

A photograph of Kendrick Lamar on the cover of Rolling Stone magazine. He is wearing a black leather bomber jacket with a large white 'S' and 'F' logo on the left chest, over a white t-shirt. He has short dreadlocks and a beard, looking directly at the camera. A woman's hands are visible at the top, touching his hair. In the background, the midsection of another person wearing blue jeans is visible.

Rolling Stone

Issue 1231 >> March 26, 2015
\$4.99

**BAGHDAD
ON THE BRINK**

**The
Battle
Against
ISIS**

**SKRILLEX
& DIPLO**

**'BETTER
CALL SAUL'**

The Trials of KENDRICK LAMAR

**A HIP-HOP SUPERSTAR
COMES TO TERMS WITH THE
STREETS THAT MADE HIM**

**Mumford
& Sons'
Electric
Surprise**

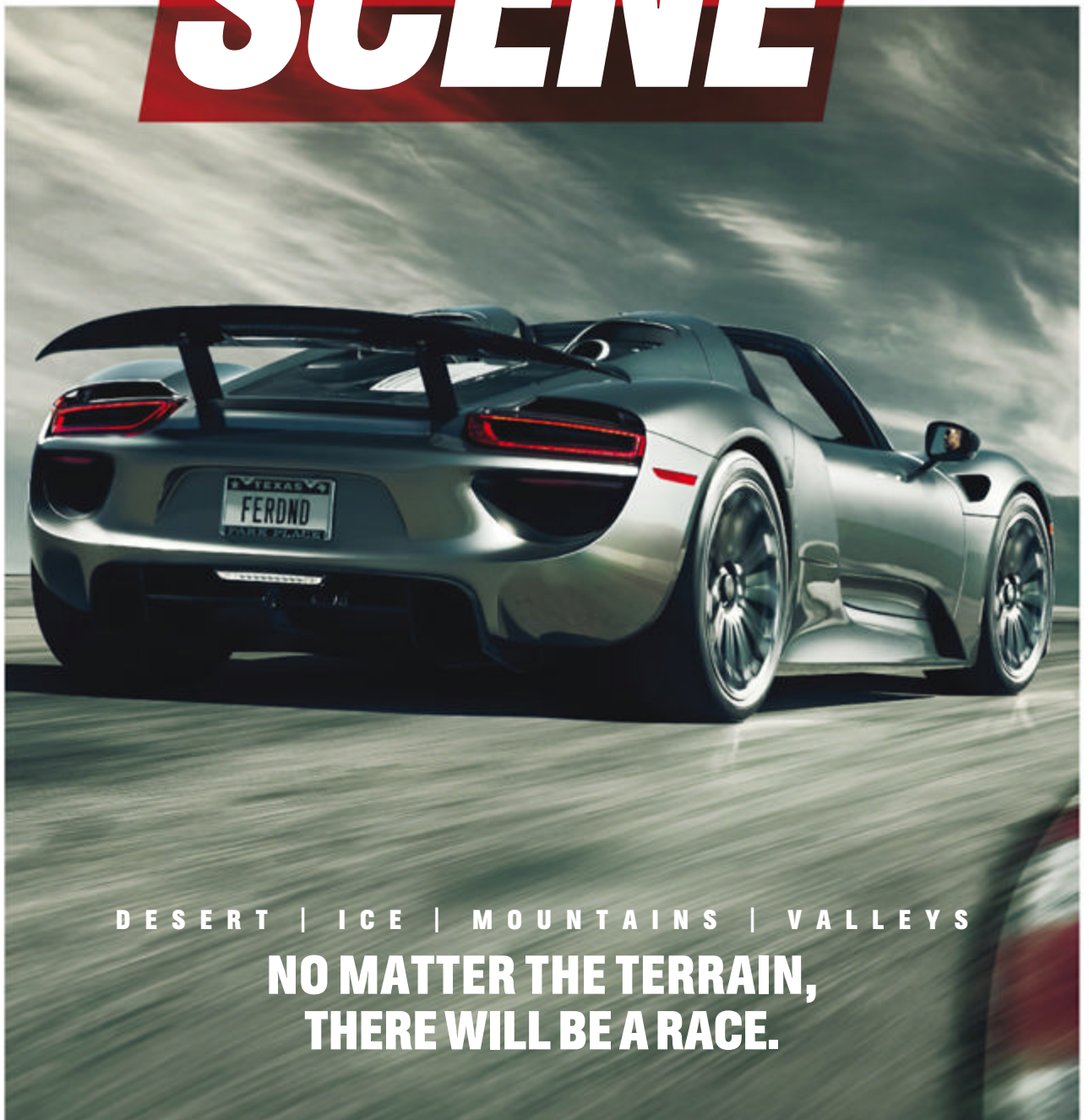
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A SPECIAL REPORT

MARCH / APRIL

2015

STREET SCENE



DESERT | ICE | MOUNTAINS | VALLEYS

**NO MATTER THE TERRAIN,
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STREET SCENE

WHERE THERE IS
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A WAY. THE TERRAIN
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MOTORSPORT BY TERRAIN



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RACE FOR THE SKY

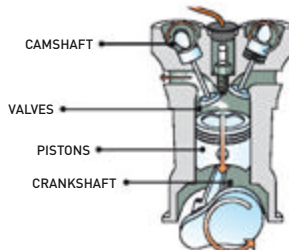


Pike's Peak ranks among Colorado's tallest mountains and is home to America's oldest race. Driving the 19 miles to the peak pits racers against both the clock and the treacherous mountain road. Beating both requires working the engine harder than ever as it hurtles the car up the hill through thinner and thinner air. The stress on the engine is enormous, and a high-performance oil is mandatory if you want to make it to the top.



UNDERSTANDING THE ENGINE WHILE IN MOTION

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RS1231 "All the NEWS THAT FITS"

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With ISIS outside the capital, the hard men of the city are fighting back with their own reign of terror. By MATTHIEU AIKINS

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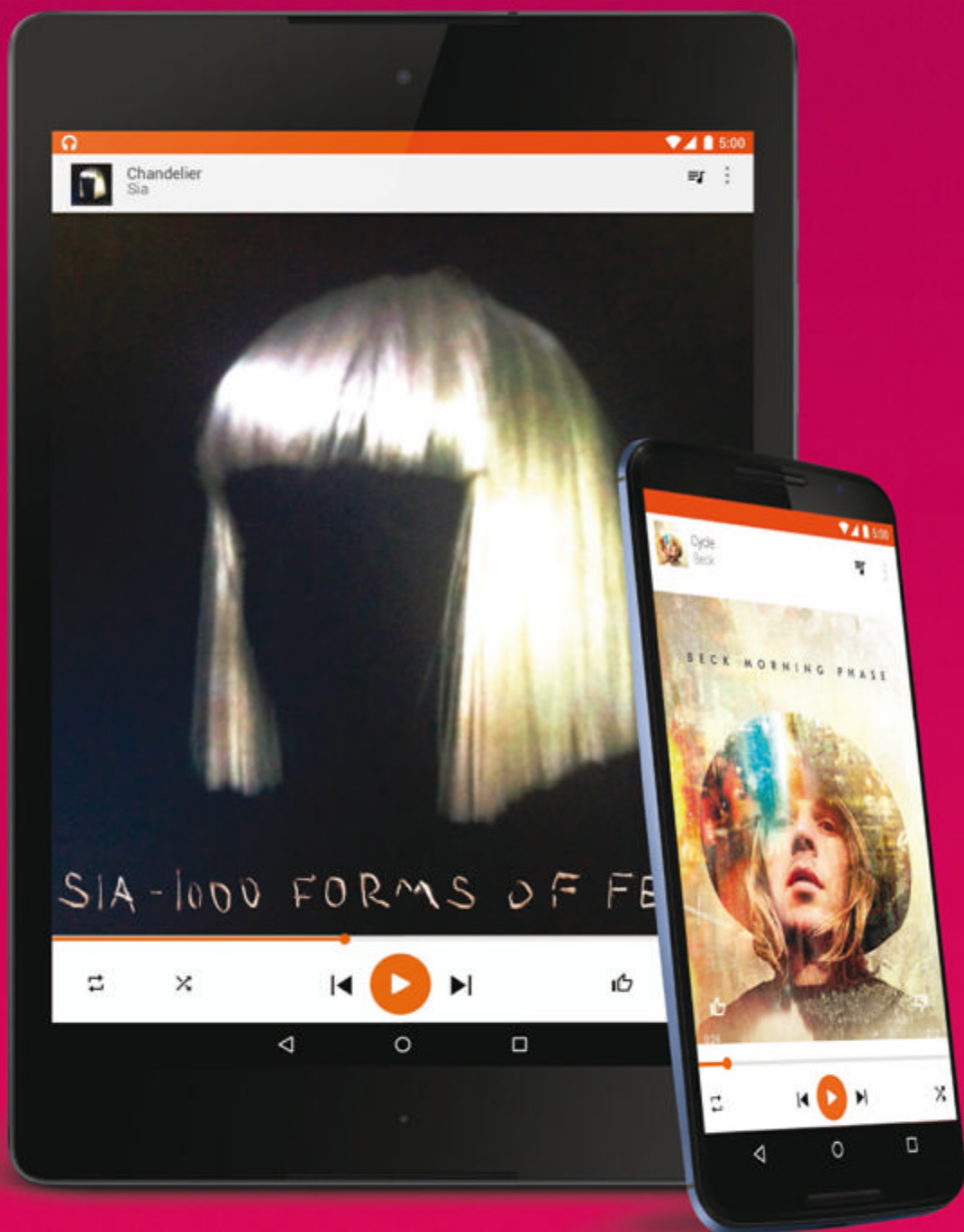
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ON THE COVER Kendrick Lamar photographed at Milk Studios in Los Angeles on February 12th, 2015, by Theo Wenner.

Styling by Dianne Garcia. Grooming by John Mosley. Jacket from F AS IN FRANK, overalls by Dickies, shirt by A.P.C.



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PREMIERE

Hendrix
in 1967

JIMI HENDRIX: RARE TUNES FROM HIS SESSION-MAN DAYS

Before he set rock & roll on fire, Hendrix was a session guitarist cutting tracks with Curtis Knight and the Squires. Check out "Gloomy Monday" and "You Can't Use My Name," from a new compilation of his work with the R&B group.



FILM

Diplo

MAJOR LAZER TAKE KINGSTON

In the latest chapter of our "Mastering the Craft" series (presented by Patrón), Diplo and crew make a pilgrimage to Jamaica for a show and some dancehall history.



Q&A

Ulrich, 1984

METALLICA: THE BEGINNING

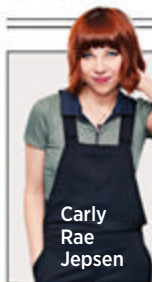
We spoke to Lars Ulrich about Metallica's extensive reissue campaign, beginning with their 1982 demo tape. "It just sounds so fucking innocent," he says. "And so instinctive."



EXCLUSIVE

SCIENTOLOGY: THE REAL STORY

Read our extensive interviews with writer Lawrence Wright and director Alex Gibney about their documentary *Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief*.



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ROLLING STONE (ISSN 0035-791X) is published biweekly except for the first issue in July and at year's end, when two issues are combined and published as double issues, by Wenner Media LLC, 1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10104-0298. The entire contents of ROLLING STONE are copyright © 2015 by ROLLING STONE LLC, and may not be reproduced in any manner, either in whole or in part, without written permission. All rights are reserved. Canadian Goods and Service Tax Registration No. R125041855. International Publications Mail Sales Product Agreement No. 450553. The subscription price is \$39.96 for one year. The Canadian subscription price is \$52.00 for one year, including GST, payable in advance. Canadian Postmaster: Send address changes and returns to P.O. Box 63, Malton CFC, Mississauga, Ontario L4T 3B5. The foreign subscription price is \$80.00 for one year, payable in advance. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Canada Post publication agreement #40683192. Postmaster: Send address changes to ROLLING STONE Customer Service, P.O. Box 62230, Tampa, FL 33662-2230.



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LOVE LETTERS
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'SNL' at 40

SUCH AN ENTERTAINING and intriguing piece ["*Saturday Night Live*. 40 Years. 141 Cast Members. We Rank Them All," RS 1229]. Rob Sheffield's breakdown of SNL's great (and disappointing) moments captured the highs and lows of a show that still defines and influences American pop culture. Here's to 40 more years of astounding TV.

*Ainsley MacDougall
Calgary, Alberta*

NEARLY CANCELED MY subscription – not really – when I saw your SNL rankings. Probably the biggest injustice was Norm Macdonald and Michael O'Donoghue placed virtually at the bottom of the list. Watch Macdonald's portrayal of Bob Dole, or Burt Reynolds on *Jeopardy!* And O'Donoghue's "Mr. Mike" character remains legendary four decades removed.

*Eric J. Smith
Bloomfield, MI*

ROB SHEFFIELD'S COUNT-down of SNL cast members was the first thing I read after my wife and I told our kids we would be getting divorced. Thanks for letting me know I can still laugh.

Scott Lenz, Los Angeles

I'M REALLY NOT SURE IF even one cast member is in the right spot, though Robert Downey Jr. probably was

Climate and the Military

In RS 1229, Jeff Goodell reported on one of our most pressing national-security issues: climate change. It's a challenge that the Pentagon takes seriously, but the brass has found itself hamstrung by deniers in Congress ["The Pentagon and Climate Change"]. The Navy plugged our story on social media as ROLLING STONE readers wrote in to comment.

THE MILITARY HAS COME through as the voice of reason here, taking an apolitical stance in a starkly politicized debate. The 2016 presidential election is approaching. If the GOP wants to move into the 21st century and make their revisionist candidates (Jeb Bush's advisers include Paul Wolfowitz) appeal to the open-minded, they should nominate a realist, not a denialist. The rest of the world is watching.

M. Bud, London

GOODELL'S MULTILAYERED story on the Pentagon and climate change is yet another fine article from RS on this global concern. As the oceans rise, droughts persist and populations are displaced, the military will have many new and challenging roles. Unfortunately, I look forward to more stories on this subject.

*Richard Thorum
Via the Internet*

PERHAPS THE NAVY should bill the Koch brothers for the expenses they're incurring as a result of climate change. The Kochs have poured millions into climate-denial propaganda and lob-

bying GOP politicians. And the Tea Party has spewed its anti-science twaddle far and wide.

John Irving, Ottawa

LIVING IN CHESAPEAKE, Virginia, a city next to Norfolk, I know all about these flooding issues. As Goodell points out, Congress has its heads up its arse. When will GOP climate deniers finally get it? When they have to row to work?

Robb Camp, Chesapeake, VA



CO₂ AND METHANE ARE climate steroids. Back in the Seventies, some of the first climate scientists warned about what would happen if business as usual continued. Beware the Merchants of Doubt.

Martin Brodie, Conyers, GA

LIKE NERO, CONGRESS fiddles while the planet burns.

Karen Caine, Brick, NJ

the worst of all time. Joan Cusack at No. 93, one spot ahead of Cheri Oteri! Sorry, I'm shouting. Please redo this. For the children. Oh, the humanity!

Ken Vetter, via the Internet

Björk Eternal

HAVING THE INCOMPARABLE Björk sit down with the incomparable David Fricke was an inspired choice [Q&A, RS 1229]. I guess I'm not surprised that

Björk loved Joni Mitchell's great Seventies records. Both singers push the boundaries of their art, and both create intimate worlds and albums full of profoundly beautiful songs.

Allison Evander, via the Internet

Dirty Girl Talk

MARGARET CHO HOSTING A sex-themed talk show is a no-brainer ["Sex and the Stand-Up Girl," RS 1229]. Cho on Courtney Love: "You know she cannot wait to behead someone" – priceless.

Mikal Vyes, via the Internet

DeVito Dishes

DANNY DEVITO IS A NATIONAL treasure [Encounter, RS 1229]. I only pray I'll have half his appetites when I'm 70.

*Ed Krakowski
Via the Internet*

Davies vs. Davies

RAY DAVIES IS THE BEST storyteller in rock ["My Life in 15 Songs," RS 1229]. If there's a God, I'll be able to take my kids to a Kinks show so they can experience the real deal.

Kevin Lunt, via the Internet

I'D LIKE TO CORRECT MY brother Ray's statement about the guitar on "You Really Got Me." I alone created the guitar sound for the song with my Elpico amp that I bought. I slashed the speaker with a razor blade, which resulted in the "You Really Got Me" tone. There were no knitting needles used in making my guitar sound.

Dave Davies, London

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THE PLAYLIST

OUR FAVORITE ALBUMS AND VIDEOS RIGHT NOW



1. Kanye West feat. Theophilus London, Allan Kingdom and Paul McCartney "All Day"

Just when you thought Kanye's entire album was going to be full of heartfelt, reflective ballads like early singles "Only One" and "FourFiveSeconds," he takes a sharp left turn with this five-alarm blaze of a song. It's fast, it's furious – and it's got a psychedelic whistle solo from Paul McCartney, just because.

2. Mumford & Sons "Believe"

The first taste of the band's plugged-in third album is a bold declaration of its new sound, building from a moody, synth-y verse to an arena-rocking chorus with shades of U2 and Coldplay.



3. Fern Mayo "Orangina Filth"

This single from the New York act is an instant basement-rock anthem, all low-fi guitar noise and shout-along melodies. We can't wait to hear more.

4. Kacey Musgraves "Biscuits"

No one does no-nonsense attitude quite like Kacey. This new tune, which she's been performing live, is exhibit A: "Mind your own biscuits, and life will be gravy."



5. My Morning Jacket "Big Decisions"

The Jacket are back-et! The Kentucky jam kings' first album since 2011 is due out May 4th, and if this pleading, soul-tinged song is any indication, it'll be a big hit at campfire cookouts all summer long.

6. Carly Rae Jepsen "I Really Like You"

There may never be another song as catchy as "Call Me Maybe," but Carly Rae's new single comes close. It's really, really, really, really catchy.

7. Lady Gaga "Till It Happens to You"

We're loving the way Gaga is putting her vocal chops front and center lately – like in this big, empowering ballad from the new documentary *The Hunting Ground*.



EXPERT OPINION



Mavis Staples

Staples recently worked on *Don't Lose This*, a posthumous LP by her late father, Pops Staples, and she has a new EP of her own due out in April.

OLD

Mahalia Jackson "Take My Hand Precious Lord"

Sister Mahalia Jackson was one of the first ladies' voices I ever heard when I was a little girl. My pops told me I'd start rocking when her music came on.

Sly and the Family Stone "I Want to Take You Higher"

Sly takes me to church when he sings this one. He's like an old deacon. Jump up and clap your hands – that's the feeling.

Bob Dylan "Lay, Lady, Lay"

He's my first love, me and Bobby. We were close. Every time I hear this song, I think, "He's singing that to me."

NEW

Alabama Shakes "Don't Wanna Fight"

Brittany Howard is my girl! She has this smooth voice, and then all of a sudden she breaks out and gives you total soul.

Kanye West "Only One"

Kanye puts on all this toughness, but he's really a teddy bear. This song is so beautiful, it almost brought tears to my eyes.

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TO ENDURE
A LIFETIME OF
BACON JOKES



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Rock & Roll

Mumford Go Electric

No banjos, no problem: Band reinvents its sound on 'Wilder Mind' By Patrick Doyle

WHEN MUMFORD & SONS bassist Ted Dwane showed up at his London studio early last year to begin work on the group's third album, he was confronted with a surprise: a room full of synthesizers. "It was bizarre," he says. "I

didn't expect we were going to do the same thing again - but this was crazy!"

On their new album, *Wilder Mind* (out May 4th), Mumford & Sons have mostly removed their signature elements - banjo, acoustic strumming, stomping kick drum - and replaced

them with U2-size guitars, synths, spacey Mellotrons and even drum machines. "We felt that doing the same thing, or the same instrumentation again, just wasn't for us," says frontman Marcus Mumford. "We've got a broader taste in music than just that." Adds [Cont. on 16]



MUMFORD 2.0
Marshall,
Mumford, Lovett,
Dwane (from
left) in January

MUMFORD & SONS

[Cont. from 15] Dwane, "None of us had any interest in doing *Babel 2*. It was always going to be different."

Near the end of the tour supporting their most recent album, *Babel*, Mumford & Sons were worn out; they'd been on the road nonstop since 2007. "You get an exhaustion that is so deep in your bones, you hardly notice it's there anymore," says Dwane. But it wasn't just physical fatigue—they were also feeling restless musically. At soundchecks, they started jamming on heavy instrumentals and even some Radiohead tunes.

After a three-month break, the band headed first to Dwane's studio, then moved last summer to one owned by National guitarist Aaron Dessner, whom they'd become friendly with on the festival circuit. Dessner occasionally sat in with the band as it wrote and experimented in the small garage studio, a 400-square-foot space in Brooklyn's leafy Ditmas Park neighborhood. Sessions would sometimes stretch from late morning until 4 a.m., with breaks to watch the World Cup. "I was in awe, seeing this band that headlined huge festivals hanging at the local coffee shop or demo'ing in this tiny garage space, kind of starting over," says Dessner.

At first, Dessner had doubts about the new direction. ("It's a little bit daunting to move on from that kind of success," he says.) But then, one humid evening in August, they were drinking beer on Dessner's stoop when Mumford insisted they record a track together, live in the studio, with no

overdubs. Everything seemed to come together as the band bashed away for several minutes, with Winston Marshall playing an electric Gibson hollow-body, Lovett running his synth through delay pedals, and Mumford playing drums and singing. "There was some weird magic in the air," says Dessner. "That was the moment where



IN THE ROOTS
Mumford and Marshall in Glastonbury, England, 2013

it didn't scare me that they were plugging in." At one point, later in the sessions, Dessner suggested adding banjo to a song. "They weren't having any of it," he says.

Though Mumford had written most of the lyrics on previous albums, everyone had input this time. "The boys kept coming up with a bunch of amazing lyrics that I found really fun to sing," says Mumford. "It was quite a liberating experience—really relishing singing someone else's lyrics."

They had plenty of real-life material to draw from. Since the last album, Dwane and Marshall have both seen the end of long-term relationships, and turmoil and heartbreak define songs like "Believe" and

"Only Love." "Half of the band has gone toward this sort of happy marriage," says Dwane with a laugh, "and the other half has gone the opposite direction, to a lonely single existence."

Dessner wasn't able to see the album through, because he had to tour with the National. But by the time Mumford & Sons entered London's AIR Studios with producer James Ford (Haim, Arctic Monkeys) in November, they had about 40 songs ready to record. Mumford and Ford shared drumming duties, and the group expanded its sound around Ben Lovett's new keyboards and Marshall's reverb-soaked lead guitar. "Anyone was able to pick up a synth or a drum machine or electric guitar, and just create," says Mumford. "There was nothing off the table."

As the band added more and more new instruments to the mix, restraint became important. "There's more space on this record than there was on the last two," says Mumford. "You listen to an Old Crow album and there's not a huge amount of space. But you listen to a Zeppelin album and you actually hear the space."

Now, Mumford & Sons are getting the songs ready for the road. Their summer tour includes a headlining slot at Bonnaroo and several of their Gentlemen of the Road Stopover Shows, where they take over an out-of-the-way town and stage a two-day festival. With its big new sound, is the band looking to be a stadium act? "I really don't know," says Dwane. "Honestly, we're still getting our heads around the fact that we get to go on an airplane and play music outside of London. So we'll see."

BIG SEAN MAKES KANYE PROUD

The Detroit MC scores a Number One album, gets mentor's respect

As a 10-year-old in Detroit, Big Sean would rap along with Notorious B.I.G. songs on the family TV. Now he's a major star himself: His third album, *Dark Sky Paradise*, topped *Billboard*'s albums chart by selling 173,000 copies. Critics and fans have hailed the LP, executive-

produced by Sean's mentor Kanye West, as a big step up from his first two albums—and Sean agrees. "People from Jay Z to Kanye tell me, 'I can hear you getting better,'" he says. "That's tight."

West plays a big role on the set, adding vocals and/or beats to the hit "IDFWU," the emotional "One Man Can Change the World" and more. "He always brings the best out of me," Sean says. Also present, on the bonus

track "Research," is Sean's girlfriend, Ariana Grande.

Last fall, Sean achieved another longtime dream, guesting on his hometown hero Eminem's "Detroit vs. Everybody." "I bought his first CD at Costco with my mom when I was 11," Sean says. "Imagine what it's like to go from there to being in the studio with him, eating pizza and talking about which is better, *South Park* or *Family Guy*."

SIMON VOZICK-LEVINSON



Big Sean

FROM TOP: SHIRLAINE FOREST/WIREIMAGE; CASEY CURRY/INVISION/AP IMAGES



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#VARYSEXY

Modest Mouse's Perfect Mess

Inside the chaotic sessions for the band's first album in eight years. By Patrick Doyle

THERE HAVE BEEN A COUPLE of times I've been drunk and attacked pretty viciously," says Isaac Brock. "But there's one I replay in my head." Describing one of his low points of the past decade, Brock recalls the night his band Modest Mouse played a show in Nottingham, England, in May 2007. After the gig, he remembers, "some shitbag and his friend who fancied themselves gangsters" started heckling Brock and his guitar tech in an alley. "They said, 'Where do you think you're going?' I'm like, 'I'm just going to get kabobs, man!'" A shoving match ensued, and Brock threw the first punch. "The next thing I know, I'm dropping to my knees," he says. "He smashed me in the face with a bottle. I actually saw a faucet of blood shooting out of the side of my face, like a fucking ninja movie. And everything kind of started darkening pretty quick. I replay that, and I think, 'What if that'd been the last thing I saw?'"

Modest Mouse – which Brock has fronted since 1993 – are one of the biggest and most beloved indie-rock bands of the past 20 years. "They were like the second coming of Nirvana for me," says Black Keys drummer Patrick Carney, who saw them play clubs in Cleveland in the Nineties. "They're still one of my favorite bands."

In 2004, to the surprise of pretty much everyone who admired their dark, schizophrenic arrangements, they scored a huge radio hit ("Float On"), and their next album, 2007's *We Were Dead Before the Ship Even Sank*, went to Number One. But as Brock says, "If I'm good at anything, it's self-sabotage." Brock's personal messes in the past have included beligerent gigs (he reportedly unleashed a knife on his torso onstage in 2007) and a 1999 date-rape allegation (which was later dropped) – and, by his own account, he even spent about a week in jail on an attempted-murder charge in the early

2000s (according to Brock, the charge stemmed from a DUI accident in which a friend suffered a thumb injury).

The making of Modest Mouse's sixth studio album, *Strangers to Ourselves*, their first LP in eight years, was typically chaotic. Today, as he chain-smokes in his New



GOOD NEWS
Brock in New
York in February

“For three years, I’d wake up, go to the studio, be there all day, work until night and then just party.”

York hotel and sips from a big bottle of Doc's Draft Hard Cider, Brock, 39, lists the reasons for the long wait: too much touring, building a new studio, losing a bassist – but he mostly blames his own obsessive brain. "I'm absolutely terrified of making a half-assed record – spending resources for three good songs and eight shitty ones," he says. "And the longer I waited to put it out, the more stressed I felt about giving people something that was worth the wait."

Strangers is a classic Modest Mouse record, with melodic left turns; loud, jagged riffs; and Brock's cracked, winding narratives, which are full of wild Vonnegut-like humor. Climate devastation is a big theme; "Lampshades on Fire" is about people creating havoc and then moving on to a new planet to do it all again. "We are absolutely fucked," Brock says. "We did some pretty good things, but mainly just fucked up and ate a lot."

For *Strangers*, Brock wanted to "cross wires" with another artist. So the bandmates went to Atlanta's Stankonia Studios to record with Outkast's Big Boi. They recorded five songs that were later scrapped. "They brought in some top-notch musicians," says Brock – including R&B pros who'd played with Bootsy Collins and Cameo. But Brock wasn't used to hip-hop recording methods, like using digital guitar-amp emulators. "There was a cleanliness to those songs I'm not sure I'm comfortable with," he says. "But largely, we just got to know each other and got wasted." (In 2012, Big Boi said, "I learned how to make an apple into a bong from one of the guys in the band.")

In 2012, Brock bought an old check-printing factory in his hometown of Portland, Oregon, and turned it into a studio he calls Ice Cream Party. It effectively became a 24-hour clubhouse for the Portland rock scene. "For three years, I'd wake up, go to the studio, be there all day, work until night and then just party," he says. "There was a lot of drinking and weed smoking and shit. Half of us stay up until 7 a.m." Brock used several producers, including Tucker Martine (Spoon) and Andrew Weiss (Butthole Surfers), with sessions happening simultaneously in different rooms. "There were songs that we did 100-or-some takes," says Brock. "Finally, I'd have to be like, 'Look, we have no idea why we're doing this again.'"

One person was noticeably absent: Eric Judy, the band's bassist of [Cont. on 20]

FROM THE CREATOR OF VERONICA MARS

ZOMBIE

KICKING ASS AND TAKING BRAINS



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CHECKING IN

Dwight Yoakam Goes Back to the Barrooms

Country star returns to his cowpunk roots on the fiery 'Second Hand Heart'

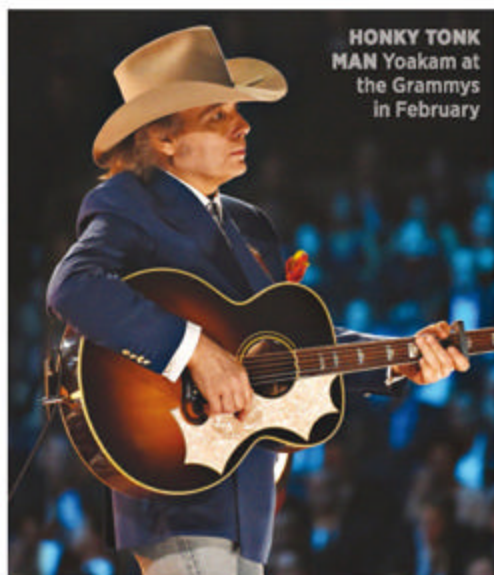
FOR 38 NIGHTS LAST FALL, Dwight Yoakam brought his rhinestone-bedazzled honky-tonk show to arenas for the first time in more than a decade – but instead of headlining, Yoakam was the opening act on Eric Church's *Outsiders* tour. "A lot of

ond Hand Heart (due April 14th). It's a return to Yoakam's fiery "cowpunk" sound, which he discovered in the late Seventies, after striking out in Nashville, moving to L.A., and opening for punk and rock bands like X and Los Lobos. The album features his best songs in years: from the title track, a Roy Orbison-like ballad about falling back in love that's built around a Stonesy riff, to a revved-up punk take on "Man of Constant Sorrow." "It's that collision of Bill Monroe meeting the Ramones that embodies the nightclubs we came out of," Yoakam says.

The man Johnny Cash called his favorite male singer has never been a typical country star. Yoakam favors complex Beatles-influenced melodies, has been a successful actor (see *Sling Blade*) and never drank alcohol or did drugs. "I had enough problems without flicking the match in that dynamite shack," he says. His 1986 debut featured hits like "Honky Tonk Man" and "Guitars, Cadillacs," and Yoakam went on to sell 25 million albums over the next decade. The hits dried up in the mid-Nineties, around the time Yoakam's acting career took off.

Yoakam went seven years without releasing an album of original songs, breaking the spell with 2012's *3 Pears*. That album included two cuts co-produced by Beck, a collaboration Yoakam says was the catalyst for him to rev up his sound again on *Second Hand Heart*. Now, Yoakam is back playing theaters and casinos, and he no longer cares about making the charts. "I don't have that burden on me at this point," he says. "I had a great run."

PATRICK DOYLE



the audience was new to anything older than three or four years old in country music," says Yoakam, 58. "It was almost like walking out and playing early in my career when people were just getting to know me."

The feeling of plunging into his past extends to Yoakam's upcoming album, *Sec-*

MODEST MOUSE

[Cont. from 18] nearly two decades and Brock's frequent writing partner, who left in 2012. "The actual reasons have never really been explained to me," Brock claims. "I don't know if there was personal stuff." (Judy chose not to comment for this story.)

Brock had a novel idea for a studio replacement: Nirvana bassist Krist Novoselic. "He wrote back and said, 'Wow, an actual offer to play music, that never happens!'" says Brock. "He's one of the nicest dudes

I've met, likes to party. He's usually got a drunk dog." It didn't work out. "Krist's got a specific style that doesn't necessarily lend itself to a large variety of songs," says Brock, adding that the Novoselic tracks may appear on the next Modest Mouse album, which is "already in the works." Brock's friend James Mercer dropped by sessions and heard the acoustic ballad "Coyotes." "I teared up, it was just so moving," says Mercer, who sings throughout the LP.

Through it all, Modest Mouse kept playing big shows, like Coachella in 2013.

"Despite times people think I got too drunk and played shitty shows, when we fucking play a good show, I think we're fucking one of the best things out there," says Brock.

Though the album is done, Brock still can't seem to let it go. "I'm still mixing some of the songs," he says. "I just want to finish getting the mixes where I thought they could have been. I'm just not satisfied, so I'm going to keep working on it so I can at least feel done. And I think that's possible." He shrugs. "But maybe it's not."

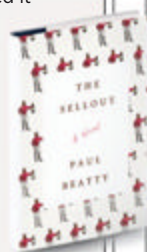


HOT BOOK

CONFESSIONS OF A MODERN SLAVE OWNER

Paul Beatty has spent his career exploding ideas of racial authenticity. His 1996 debut novel, *The White Boy Shuffle*, about a black high school basketball player from Santa Monica trying to fit in the hood, got enough acclaim that Phil Jackson gifted it to a young Kobe Bryant. The 52-year-old Beatty's excellent new novel, *The Sellout* – his fourth, and first in seven years – balances stereotypes like spinning plates. The book's young black narrator is a weed and watermelon grower whose father was gunned down by the cops. He is also – in one of the novel's many absurdist twists – a slave owner. If the subject matter is incendiary, Beatty is refreshingly casual describing its inspiration. "I was broke," he says of his motivations for starting the book. "Usual crap. I got this grant, and I had to make up something for it." *The Sellout* is hilariously caustic, but Beatty is relatively positive about the progress America has made. "I think people actually do a good job talking about race," he says. "I'm not sure why [some think] it's supposed to be easier."

DARREN REIDY





Will Forte Finds Laughs at the End of the World

'SNL' vet on his apocalyptic new sitcom, 'MacGruber' and Jimmy Page's guitar

THE LAST MAN ON EARTH might just have the strangest premise of any sitcom ever: Ex-SNL cast member Will Forte putters around a world where humankind has been ravaged by a viral outbreak, talking to tennis balls and indulging in gleefully destructive whims. (Two words: margarita pool.) Forte's big post-SNL project, 2010's *MacGruber*, tanked at the box office. But *Last Man*, which he created with *The Lego Movie*'s Chris Miller and Phil Lord, already looks to be an odd-ball hit, proving that Forte can make even the apocalypse seem hilarious.

This wasn't the first idea you guys had for a show, right?

I can't remember who threw the *Last Man* concept out there, but I remember we all went, "Uh, no." Originally... well, for a while Val Kilmer was sleeping on my couch.

Come again?

He was looking for a place in Malibu. We'd become friends after *MacGruber* and he asked, "Can I stay with you for a couple of days?" That turned into two months. So we were going to do something based on that situation, but then Chris said, "Wait, let's take one more look at that post-apocalyptic thing...." Something just clicked.

Were you worried audiences wouldn't watch you wandering the Earth by yourself for 13 episodes?

I like that the show ends up being different than what you think it's going to be. I would compare it to *MacGruber* in that I'm sure a lot of folks were like, "Wait, is it just going to be some guy getting blown up every two minutes?" [Pauses] Actually, hardly anybody saw *MacGruber*, so maybe that's the wrong thing to compare this to.

How painful was the less-than-stellar reception that "MacGruber" received?

I know this sounds crazy, because it's just a bunch of dick jokes, but I'm as proud of *MacGruber* as I am of *Nebraska*. It was painful, but I learned that when you've done something you like, it doesn't hurt as much if it fails.

Did you ever bomb on "SNL"?

I did this really stupid sketch called "Fart Face," where Bill Hader keeps calling me Fart Face. It tanked in dress rehearsal – not even crickets were chirping. Then Lorne picked it to be in the show! We were like, "How cool is it he's standing by us?" It bombed even worse on air.

Your character grabs a Van Gogh painting and the Oval Office's rug. What would you nab if you were the last man on Earth?

Am I stuck in North America? If not, I'd grab Jimmy Page's double-neck guitar. Honestly, the kind of dumb shit you see my character do in the show – I'd be more into that. It doesn't take a lot to make me happy. Just a bowling ball, a parking lot and some fish tanks.

DAVID FEAR

HOT PRODUCER

INSIDE THE 'EMPIRE' HIT FACTORY

Meet the Timbaland protégé and 'multitasking superhero' behind the show's songs

One of the biggest reasons for the monster success of *Empire*, Fox's over-the-top hip-hop soap opera, is its original music – five songs performed by the show's characters have even climbed into the Top 30 on the R&B charts. The original songs are supervised by Timbaland, but mostly created by Jim Beanz, a 35-year-old protégé whom Timbaland calls "a multitasking superhero."

Beanz usually has about a day to write and record a track for the show, based on story information relayed by *Empire*'s producers. The show isn't just content to turn out Top 40

facsimiles – Beanz wants innovation. "Tim told me, 'If it sounds like something you've heard before, don't do it,'" says the Philadelphia-based Beanz. After completing a demo, Beanz sends the song to Timbaland, who'll suggest changes. Then, after the track is approved by Fox and the show's creative brain trust, Beanz flies to Chicago, where *Empire* is shot, to record cast members' vocals. And if that weren't enough, Beanz also plays rapper Titan on the show.

"Oh, my God, this has been the most stressed I've been in my whole career," says Beanz, who was a member of the Pennsylvania R&B group Tresan in the Nineties, before turning his attention to writing and producing. He first teamed up with Timbaland on Nelly Furtado's 2006 album *Loose*, and has been working with him ever since.

Empire co-creator Lee Daniels hints at major changes in Season Two: "To be an empire, the series has to be in a bigger world than just hip-hop," he says. Daniels adds that Lucious Lyon, the record-label owner played by Terrence Howard, "should have country singers, he should have rock singers." Though Daniels figures the show will have to hire new songwriters for the task, Beanz insists his skills extend beyond hip-hop and R&B: "I'm absolutely capable and ready to do whatever is thrown my way."

MARK YARM



FRIDAY · JANUARY 23 - SUNDAY · JANUARY 25

ROLLING STONE AT MERRELL TRAILScape

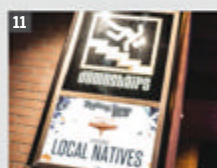
MERRELL AND ROLLING STONE BROUGHT THE PARTY TO PARK CITY. LIVE MUSIC, EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS AND A FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND VIRTUAL REALITY EXPERIENCE KICKED OFF THE FAMED UTAH FILM FESTIVAL.



The views from inside the TrailScape



Rolling Stone film critic, Peter Travers, tries out the TrailScape virtual reality experience and sits down for an interview with Michelle Marie.



Rolling Stone LIVE at the Merrell TrailScape was held at The Downstairs, Park City.



1) Taylor Rice of Local Natives. 2) The Merrell House on Main Street. 3) Scott Weiland and the Wildabouts. 4) Guests hang out at the Merrell TrailScape. 5) Michelle Marie interviews actor/writer/producer Tanner Beard. 6) Local Natives with Merrell president, Gene McCarthy. 7) Michelle Marie goes around with lead actor in *Dope*, Shameik Moore. 8) Merrell TrailScape guests. 9) Jamestown Revival stops by for an interview. 10) TrailScape virtual reality experience. 11) RS LIVE venue *The Downstairs*, Park City. 12) Kelcey Ayer of Local Natives. 13) Danny and Chris Masterson. 14) Avan Jogia and friends.



Rolling Stone took to Main Street to bring festival-goers the Merrell TrailScape experience. Throughout the weekend celebrity guests, film industry insiders and musical talents stopped by for interviews with host Michelle Marie and to participate in the TrailScape – a fully immersive experience that took participants on a virtual hike through the Dolomites with unexpected adventures along the way. Sunday night, the party moved below ground to *The Downstairs*, where LA-based indie rock group Local Natives played a high-energy set to an exclusive audience of Park City notables.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Misha Vladimirovsky

BAR COMPLIMENTS OF





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MERRELL 

Why 4chan's Overlord Walked Away

Christopher Poole's website made him an unlikely teenage celebrity – then it spun out of control **By David Kushner**

AT 11 A.M. ON JANUARY 21ST, Christopher Poole posted a note online saying he was retiring as the administrator of 4chan, the notorious website he had founded as a high school student in upstate New York 11 years earlier. The news was as shocking as some of the site's content: The Zuckerberg of the online underground was walking away.

Poole had started 4chan as a way for fellow anime obsessives to post and discuss images. But over the next decade, it morphed into the Net's greatest factory of memes and mayhem. LOLcats and Rick-rolling started on 4chan. So did Anonymous, the international collective of hacktivists and geeks. Most recently, 4chan has been in the crosshairs of two of the biggest controversies on the Web: the celebrity nude leaks called the Fappening, and Gamergate, the increasingly vicious battle over sexism in the video-game industry.

With 20 million unique visitors a month – and more than 40 billion page views since its inception – 4chan is one of the most-trafficked websites ever. Poole, a lanky, acerbic 27-year-old with a mop of light-brown hair, has given a popular TED talk and been the keynote speaker at SXSW Interactive, and in 2010 Facebook brought him in to give an informational address to employees (one asked if he could ever see 4chan becoming a part of Facebook; Poole's response: “Uhhhhh, nope!”). Jeff Moss, founder of the offline hacker conference DefCon, calls 4chan “the embodiment of the original Internet spirit.” When Poole topped *Time*'s poll in 2009 as “The World's Most Influential Person” – beating out Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey and the Dalai Lama – many thought he deserved it, especially the 4channers who'd gamed the vote to make sure he won.

All of which made his decision to leave 4chan seem so confounding. “I've come to represent an uncomfortably large single point of failure,” he wrote in his farewell post. What he really meant and why he was quitting were a mystery.

“4CHAN HAS GIVEN ME SOME AMOUNT of notoriety,” Poole tells me the week after he retired, “but it certainly hasn't provided me with wealth.” It's a frigid afternoon



in New York, and Poole, dressed in a gray hoodie and jeans, is digging into a brunch of poached eggs and bruschetta at a cafe in the East Village. Poole has never made money with 4chan – he tried to monetize the site's extraordinary traffic, but advertisers were always too wary of the site's content. Not long ago, he was \$20,000 in debt and had moved back in with his mom.

The only child of divorced parents, Poole would routinely stay awake until the wee hours as an adolescent, due to a dysfunction of his circadian rhythms. At 12, he built his own computer, and three years later he launched 4chan. His model was 2chan, an image board that was huge in Japan. Anyone could upload and comment on random art and photos on 2chan, from anime to cars to gore and porn. 2chan users logged on anonymously and didn't have to register any personal information. “Anonymity enables people to share things they wouldn't otherwise do,” Poole says. “That's always been my party line.”

4chan was a radical reprieve from other online communities, which had strict policies against offensive content. Poole takes pride in what he describes as the site's

“giant communal megaphone”: Unlike Reddit or Digg, where posts have to be voted into prominent view, new posts appear automatically on the top of 4chan threads. This means every 4chan user gets broadcast at full volume.

Choosing the handle “moot,” Poole posted his inaugural greeting along with a request: “I politely [ask] people not to post stupid stuff on these boards,” he wrote. The stupid stuff came anyway. English-speaking hackers and punks fled 2chan for 4chan, flooding 4chan with disgusting images – “Tubgirl,” a diarrhea-stricken woman in a bathtub, was typical. “I'm not easily offended,” Poole says, “but I have never sought out the grotesque.”

Poole created more than 60 message boards, on everything from video games to LGBT. But the one that got the most attention is what he calls “the nuthouse”: the Random board, most often identified by the last character of its website address, /b/. Racist, sexist, homophobic and anti-Semitic jokes pervaded the forums. Around 2006, the self-described “/b/tards” moved toward more extreme pranks, like inundating an online children's game with

swastikas, or calling in bomb threats to a high school and an NFL stadium.

Poole excelled at making 4chan look like the Wild West, but he had no problem playing sheriff. Whenever the FBI traced bomb threats to 4chan, Poole complied with authorities, which sometimes meant turning over the IP address of the suspected user. He also complied with the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, which required him to remove content if a copyright holder objected (although he had cover if anything slipped through the cracks: The Communications Decency Act, which gives immunity to webmasters and Internet service providers over members' content, protected him).

Poole also implemented rules of his own: no one under 18 allowed on the site, no posting of anyone's personal information, no spamming. Violators were banned. Poole has never had any employees. Instead, a couple of dozen volunteers around the world monitor threads, kept discussions on topic and removed snuff films, child porn and other illegal content.

Poole's efforts to rein in some of the chaos earned him scorn not just from the /b/tards but also from the largest collective of wired rebels in the world, Anonymous, which had first coalesced on 4chan around 2006 as a kind of inside joke ("Anonymous" is the default handle on 4chan). For a while, the Anons were more like the *Jack-ass* posse of the Net, raiding sites and pulling pranks. But in 2008, after the group organized a widely reported protest of the Church of Scientology, Poole deleted its threads because they violated his rule against using 4chan to plan invasions or protests. Gregg Housh, an early and prominent Anon, recalls the group "yelling and screaming about the fact he shouldn't be censoring content on that site," he says. Today, Poole remains steadfast. When I ask him if there's free speech on 4chan, he doesn't flinch. "No," he says. "Not in the absolute sense. There never has been, ever."

Though Poole does find some 4chan posts "reprehensible" – like when a murderer posted photos of his victim on the site – he tends to speak of the site's extreme content with a clinical detachment. "If you, for example, are very offended by something like Goatse," he says, referring to a photo of a man stretching open his anus with both hands, "chances are you're not going to ever come back to 4chan."

Managing the site's content started to come with a price. Poole began getting death threats from angry 4channers. "I get a lot of e-mails of a threatening nature," he tells me. "It flares up if there is a decision that I have made that upsets people." Poole's response is to be private to the point of paranoia – he insists upon concealing his current location, countries he

recently visited and even the name of the university he briefly attended.

I first met Poole in 2009, around the time he turned 21. Visiting him in his small apartment, I found him clicking through the 4chan threads for content that violated his rules. "Most sites that have 600 million impressions have a real company behind them," he told me, wearily. There'd been more subpoenas from the FBI, more bomb threats and more hijinks at his expense (4channers had voted him to the top of Victoria's Secret's "Love Your Body" online competition). "I'm at a crossroads," he told me, "with the site and with my life."

Soon after, he decided there was more of the world he wanted to explore. Poole attended college for a time, and launched his own startup, Canvas, which developed a collaborative art program called DrawQuest. He succeeded in getting \$3.6 million in venture capital, but despite DrawQuest's popularity (it was downloaded 1.4 million times), Poole couldn't figure out a business model, and the company tanked.

After DrawQuest flamed out, Poole decided to clear his head. So last year, he

"I get a lot of threatening e-mails," says Poole, whose response borders on paranoia – he won't even reveal the name of the university he attended.

undertook what he calls "the summer of Chris." He went to Europe and Asia, reread *The Little Prince*, and took classes in cooking and ballroom dancing. He began to unplug – leaving behind his laptop and weaning himself off social media. "Why am I so concerned about what's going on back in New York?" he thought at one point while in a cafe overseas. "It's taking me out of this really great moment, this new experience."

But the good times didn't last. On the evening of August 31st, Poole was thumbing through his phone in bed when a CNN report caught his eye. Hackers leaked nude photos of dozens of celebrities, including Kate Upton and Jennifer Lawrence. One of the main hubs for the pictures was 4chan. Poole complied with takedown notices from Hollywood lawyers, which 4channers expected. But then he went further. In the wake of the leaks, he decided to post the Digital Millennium Copyright Act policy on his site for the first time – something he'd never gotten around to doing before. Some 4channers cried sellout. "Is this the end of everything?" one posted.

The same week news of the Fappening broke, so did Gamergate. It started after

the ex-boyfriend of indie game developer Zoe Quinn wrote a blog post accusing her of sleeping with a game journalist. A small mob on 4chan attributed positive reviews of her most recent game, *Depression Quest*, to this fact. "i have a standing contract with zoe for her to give me anal in exchange for a positive review on my blog," one detractor wrote. "I kind of want to just make her life irreparably [*sic*] horrible," another, OpFag, wrote. "but what if she suicides," responded another. "Good," OpFag replied. "Then we get to troll #Rememberzoe."

As the threats grew, hackers began releasing Quinn's personal information. They also targeted women who came to her defense, including feminist blogger Anita Sarkeesian and game developer Brianna Wu. 4chan "fosters an anonymous culture" of haters, Quinn tells me. "Giving them room to set up a mob and run unchecked is not helpful."

But Poole, to the victims' relief, banned all Gamergate discussion from his site. 4channers struck back, calling him a "soulless informant," saying he "doesn't give a shit" and that he "hasn't cared about 4chan for years now." Poole says the stress wore him down. "Week after week after week after week, there's this new controversy," he recalls. "I kept getting drawn back in."

Though he'd been thinking about leaving the site for at least a year, he'd finally had enough after enduring what he tells me was "probably the most stressful month of my life." Part of his motivation was a question that 4channers had been asking for years: "What happens to 4chan if you were to die?" Poole would deadpan that since his mom was his next of kin, "I guess you're going to be stuck with my mother as your new overlord."

But now, he wanted to appoint a successor so that the fate of 4chan was no longer solely in his hands. Poole says he didn't mean to imply that he had failed or, for that matter, been pushed out by his pet monster. "I was a link in a chain," he says, "and if that link was broken, the entire chain would fall apart."

Poole is in the process of turning over control of 4chan to three moderators who, unlike him, will remain anonymous. He hopes to find a buyer for the site, a prospect that leaves one of the moderators anxious that the wrong overlord might step in. "I hope he'll make a wise decision on who to sell it to," the moderator tells me.

As for Poole's own future, the boy who grew up online doesn't know what comes next. "Maybe I'll be a journeyman welder," he tells me, then falls silent for a moment. "I'm joking," he says. "I don't know – a trail guide? I like hiking. Maybe I'll become a surfer. I've only been surfing once." 



IN THE STUDIO

BEST AND
BRIGHTEST
Bruno and
Cosentino
in L.A.

Best Coast Make Their Biggest, Trippiest LP Yet

Inside the California band's third LP: Positive vibes, loud guitars and 'audio weed'

NOT LONG AGO, BEST COAST singer-guitarist Bethany Cosentino took a six-mile hike up into the mountains near her native Glendale, California. Along the way, she listened to the latest mix of *California Nights*, her band's upcoming third album (due out May 5th). "It was the first time I've been entirely happy with every song on a record," she says. "I actually feel confident – which is not how I would describe us in the past."

When Cosentino started Best Coast with guitarist Bobb Bruno five years ago, the band connected with fans in part because of how relatable her lyrics about

boredom, stress and romantic frustration were. "I was a very awkward, confused girl," she says. "Now I'm 28, and I'm still awkward and confused – but I think I've pulled it together a little better."

Cosentino, Bruno and drummer Brady Miller recorded the set in Hollywood with producer Wally Gagel, whose credits range from *Hannah Montana* to Superchunk. "He knows how to make something poppy," Cosentino says, "but he also knows how to make it fuzzy and dirty."

You can hear that blend on big, crunchy alt-rock anthems like "Feeling Okay" and "Heaven Sent." Best of all is the LP's psychedelic title track. "When I recorded the vocals, Wally turned off all the lights and put on this weird light box," Cosentino recalls. "It was like being stoned without actually being stoned. It's like audio weed, that song."

SIMON VOZICK-LEVINSON

Hot Horror: Beware the Sex Demon

IMAGINE YOU'RE A TEENAGE GIRL who's just been deflowered. Now pretend your partner tells you that you're part of a chain-letter-like curse – and unless you have sex with someone else, a shape-changing embodiment of evil will hunt you down. That's the concept behind *It Follows*, the low-fi horror movie whose slow-burning dread and throwback synth score have been earning com-

parisons to *The Shining* and *Halloween*. The longer the film's 19-year-old heroine (Maika Monroe) and her friends look for sanctuary, the more shambling, grasping figures follow. "I used to have this recurring nightmare as a kid," says director David Robert Mitchell, "where I was being followed by this thing. It's slow enough that I can get away, but I always knew it was there. It. Never. Stops. Coming." DAVID FEAR



Monroe

COMEDY

THE SKETCHES THAT SHAPED NICK KROLL

When Comedy Central's wickedly funny *Kroll Show* wraps its three-season run on March 24th, it will be going out on Nick Kroll's terms. "A lot of the storylines had reached their natural conclusions," Kroll says of his decision to end the series, which overflows with spot-on reality-TV parodies and a cast of outsize, progressively more intertwined characters. In advance of the finale, Kroll reveals the classic sketch shows that influenced his own.

The '2000 Year Old Man' albums 1961-1997

Mel Brooks and Carl Reiner's albums are almost like a sketch show. I loved that element of trying to make your friend laugh. Whether it's me and [John] Mulaney, or me and Jenny [Slate], I do my best work when I have a partner.



Kroll

Saturday Night Live 1975-present

Around 12, you're starting to form your sense of humor, and for me that was right when "Wayne's World" came out. I learned a lot from their dynamic.

SCTV 1976-1984

It created a universe of characters and shows-within-the-show that evolved and folded in on itself. Plus, they're Canadian. For some inexplicable reason, our show is obsessed with Canada.

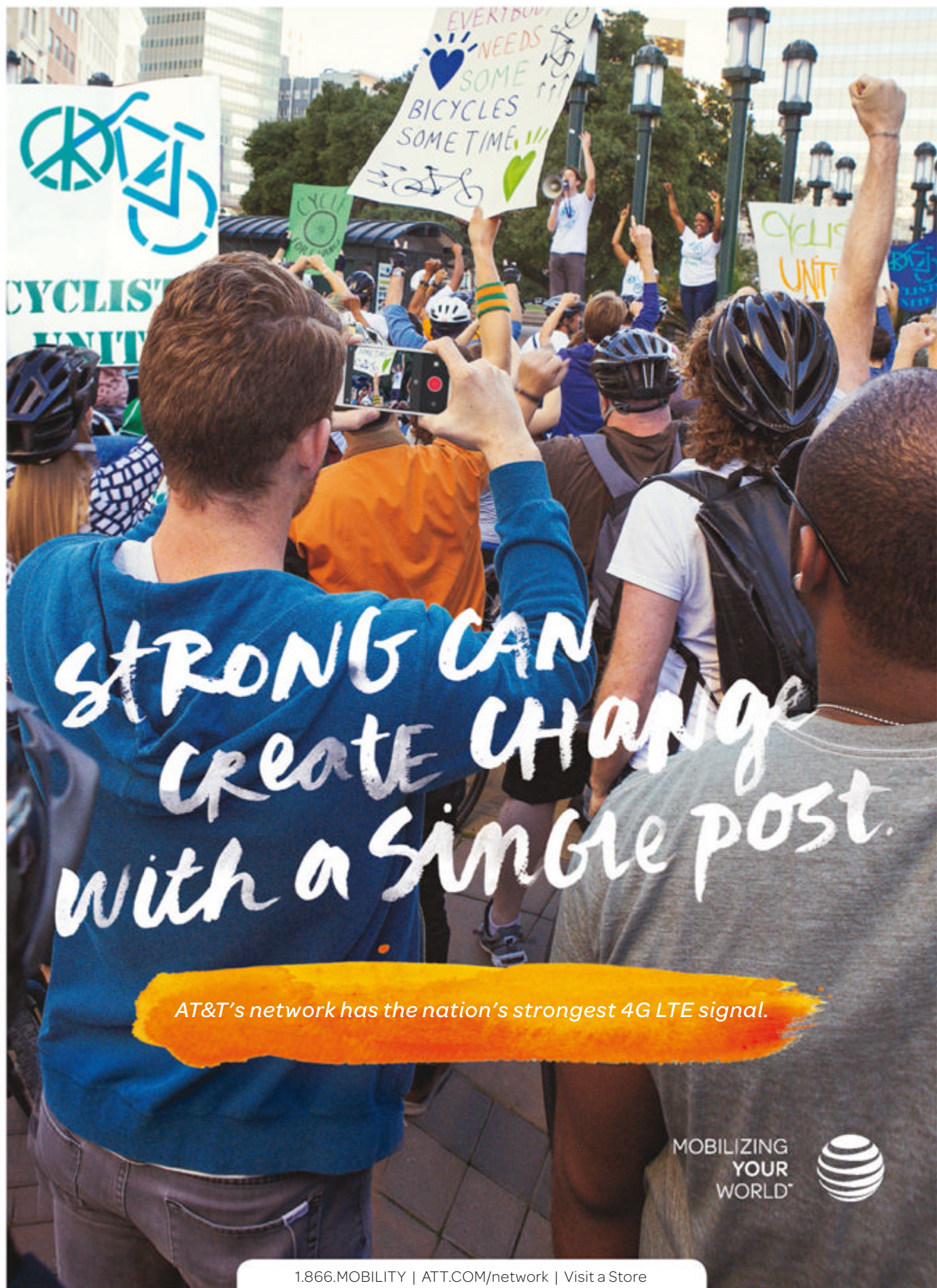
The Ben Stiller Show 1992-1993

I thought, "Wow, everything really looks like the show that they're making fun of." We've strived to do that. Like, we have the show *Dead Girl Town*, which looks as much like *True Detective* and *Justified* as possible.

Primetime Glick 2001-2003

Martin Short's Jiminy Glick was one of the first times I saw a character in an interview context who made the celebrities the straight man. My character Fabrice Fabrice is a total rip-off of Glick.

MARK YARM



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Bob Odenkirk

The 'Better Call Saul' star on 'Breaking Bad,' his new hit and the future of 'Mr. Show' By Brian Hiatt

BREAKING BAD" AND ITS IMPROBABLY great new spinoff, *Better Call Saul*, both stories of lives knocked off-course, have sparked a similarly radical real-life metamorphosis for *Saul* star Bob Odenkirk. Before taking what was supposed to be a small role on *Breaking Bad* as cravenly corrupt attorney Saul Goodman, Odenkirk, 52, was a cult-favorite comedy writer-performer (of *Mr. Show* fame) with near-zero dramatic acting experience. Since then, he's been in Alexander Payne's *Nebraska* and FX's *Fargo*, and now displays more range than ever as a younger Saul, a.k.a. Jimmy McGill, in a show he says co-creators Vince Gilligan and Peter Gould started planning as early as 2009 or 2010. "I think it was the last episode of the third season," says Odenkirk, "that Vince came to me in the hallway at the offices in Albuquerque and said, 'What do you think about a spinoff? I think there's a show in this.'"

You seem keenly aware of how unlikely all of this is.

Absolutely! I promise you I thought I was up for three episodes of *Breaking Bad* – well, they wanted me for four, but I could only do three 'cause I was in *How I Met Your Mother*. People liked Saul right away, but I always treated it as a lucky thing that maybe not many people would notice, because the show wasn't even doing that well. *Breaking Bad* was almost canceled after the second season! And believe me, when *Breaking Bad* ended, I didn't sit around praying to the patron saint of spinoffs.... Which saint is that? Saint Radar.

Or Saint Joey.

Saint Joey. I just went and wrote a book, and worked on some movie scripts, and did a tour with David Cross, and did *Fargo*. I was shocked that it happened. I think it's because I had done so much. I think a younger person would go, "This is my big break. I have to sculpt it into a career," and I'm like, "No. I'm in the middle of my career." Not that I don't perceive it as a potentially massive and meaningful kind of step up.

Did you ever feel bitter about show business?

Yes, and it's a mistake, and you have to fight it. You have to let that shit go, because that shit will fuck you up. When my manager Bernie Brillstein passed away in 2008, he'd been my manager for 13 years, and I had nothing but failure for the last five years of it.

What do you mean by failure?

I made some money acting and guest-acting, shot some commercials, and I wrote some pilots that I was proud of, but none of them got picked up. You just keep going. It's hard. I didn't do a great job over-seeing some movies that were in my hands, and the hardest thing is when you don't do a great job, and people notice, and they're like, "You didn't do a very good job," you go, "I know."

Did you have dramatic ambitions before

***Breaking Bad*?**

I wouldn't say I had driving ambitions, but I had *instincts*. Even back when I was onstage at Second City with Chris Farley, I remember consciously thinking I should probably be on a dramatic stage, because Chris Farley is so fuckin' funny [laughs]. I probably have that sort of complex, uncertain stage energy that is great in drama, 'cause it asks questions, and you're not real sure of the motivations of the character.

You once said you didn't necessarily like Saul.

I like Jimmy. Saul was clearly a front, and I wasn't sure how much of it he liked. He seemed to enjoy being a showy cheeseball, and now that I know Jimmy, I think he is just a taste-challenged individual – but he's from Chicago, and I get it, coming from a place where you don't know what you're supposed to look like. He's an earnest, sweet guy whose brain naturally cooks up dishonest solutions to the challenges in front of him.

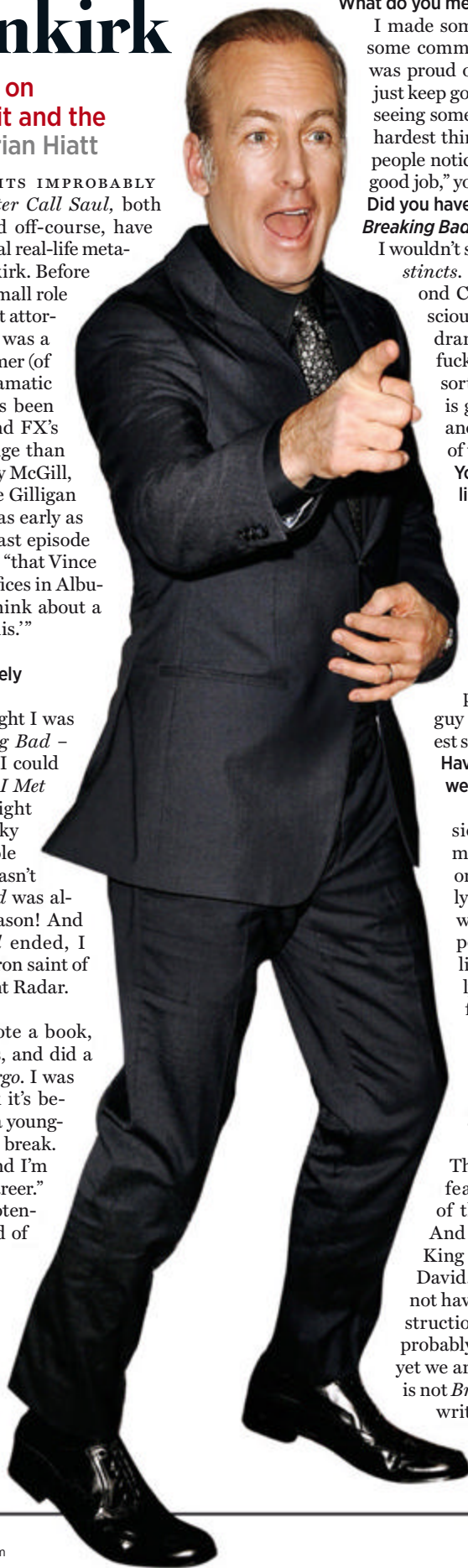
Have you ever gotten a note that you were being too funny on these shows?

No, but sometimes I do a comedy version of a scene first. For instance, the montage where I'm doing law in the second episode, that's all just me being utterly silly and ridiculous, if you could hear what I'm saying. The same thing happened in the movie *Nebraska*. I had to do, like, a local news report, and I honestly couldn't do it. So I goofed around for four takes, and I was finally able to do it straight 'cause I just had to get that shit out of my system. The part of my brain that is silly is massive.

You're working with David Cross on a new show. Is this a *Mr. Show* reunion?

There will be no *Mr. Show* reunion. There *will* be a new sketch-comedy show featuring the writing and performing of the great and special Bob and David. And please use those terms because it's like King of Pop – the Great and Special Bob and David. It will not be called *Mr. Show*, it will not have the set, the music, the logo or the construction. There will be a change in pacing and probably a more integrated bunch of ideas. And yet we are still the same people. *Better Call Saul* is not *Breaking Bad*, but it's written by the same writers and you can see connections, right?

It hopefully will be quite the same as far as the relationship between the two shows.





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PATRIOT GAMES
Russell and Rhys
as KGB agents in
the suburbs

The Coldest Warriors

For its brilliant third season, 'The Americans' amps up the stakes and makes a run at the title of TV's best drama By Rob Sheffield

ADMITTEDLY, THERE IS no right way to roll a joint for a teenage girl. But when you're a suburban American dad in the early 1980s (except you're secretly a Soviet spy)? And you're posing

The Americans

Wednesdays, 10 p.m., FX

as a shaggy-haired sleazebag in order to get way too friendly with the troubled teen daughter of a CIA honcho? And you roll up her weed stash while she hits "play" on her boombox and dances to the same album you bought your own troubled teen daughter? That is most definitely the *wrong* thing to do. And you can see it in the man's eyes – he's done a lot of loathsome things in the name of Mother Russia, but he knows he's really hitting a new low this time. But he just keeps rolling that joint.

The Americans has to be the greatest drama on TV right now – what's the competition? Nothing else on the air these days is aiming so high and bringing it off. With *Breaking Bad* gone, *Mad Men* at the end of the road, and once-hopeful contender

Downton Abbey gone off the rails, *The Americans* is looking like the last standard-bearer for the prestige-drama glory days. The new season began with a bang – both the sexual kind and the violent kind – and it just keeps cranking up the intensity week to week, combining Cold War-espionage suspense with scenes-from-a-marriage heartbreak.

Matthew Rhys and Keri Russell are superb as the Soviet spooks Philip and Elizabeth, posing as a regular suburban couple. They bring all their gamesmanship to their sex life as well as to their battle over the future of their teenage daughter, who has gotten into Jesus. Mom wants her to go into the family business as a teen KGB agent. ("At least she'll know who she *is*!") Dad wants her to assimilate and grow up to be a nice, normal, law-abiding citizen who never learns to snap men's necks like graham crackers.

Rhys looks miserable wearing the tie-and-cardigan combo that screams, "I am lost in the Eighties, and I cannot freaking wait for this decade to end."

The Reagan-era atmosphere is brilliantly evoked, from the way he pervers out watching a creepy ad for Love's Baby Soft ("Innocence is sexier than you think" – *eeew*) to the even creepier EST-training seminar.

The whole season is taking audacious dramatic risks – like the instant-classic tooth-pulling scene. Russell's Elizabeth can't go to a dentist, because she happened to injure

her teeth while kicking the holy hell out of a couple of feds and the FBI is hunting for a woman in need of oral surgery. So Philip has to pull out her tooth – and the DIY-dental-work tableau is unbelievably violent, sexual and repulsive, just one of the many hideous secrets these two share. The next time we see this couple, they're sitting in a parked car at night, listening to a surveillance wire. He casually asks, "How's your mouth?" She says, "Fine." They go back to surveilling in silence, and somehow that moment feels even more disturbing than the actual tooth-pulling.

The entire cast keeps excelling: Frank Langella is chilling as a paternal KGB handler. Annet Mahendru's Nina languishes in a Russian gulag (where she's made a connection with the underground lipstick supply), while Noah Emmerich's FBI agent mourns losing her. All the adults on *The Americans* live with the nuclear clock ticking to doomsday and nothing but guilt over the future they're building for the next generation – despite the fact that their kids are just assets to be exploited in a geopolitical struggle. One of *The Americans*' achievements is that you empathize with the despair of the adults, even as they gamble with the fate of the Earth. You wonder if any of their kids can grow up halfway sane. And then you realize: Oh, yeah. None of them did. **A**

SHORT TAKE

Last Schlub Standing

The Last Man on Earth
Sundays, 9:30 p.m., Fox

The Last Man on Earth is an admirably insane idea for a sitcom: Will Forte is an American schmo who might be the only known survivor of an epidemic that wipes out the human race circa 2020. Forte turns it into a dark solo show. He grows a Manson-like beard, stops wearing pants, soaks in a giant margarita and plans to consume the world's Twinkie supply. It's basically the Steely Dan classic "King of the World" as a comedy. After Forte tools around America looting in his RV, he ends up in Arizona, looking to find some



company in Kristen Schaal. *Last Man on Earth* was created by Forte with Phil Lord and Chris Miller (who made *The Lego Movie*). Most of the laughs come from the pain in Forte's hangdog face – the last hope for schlubdom in the post-apocalyptic wasteland. **R.S.**

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"Meeting Paul McCartney is like meeting Ralph Lauren. The greatest of their fields. Period." —Kanye West

Random Notes

Crazed DJ Commandeers Cruise Ship

"Make some noise so the fuckin' world can hear you!" Skrillex screamed to 4,000 fans and a few seagulls as he rocked the fifth Holy Ship! cruise from Miami to the Bahamas; his mates on the voyage included Fatboy Slim and Kaskade. Back on land, Skrillex hit the charts with Jack Ü, his duo with Diplo. "We aren't afraid to fail," says Skrillex. "We didn't overthink anything, and we got our friends to just come in and do it with us."



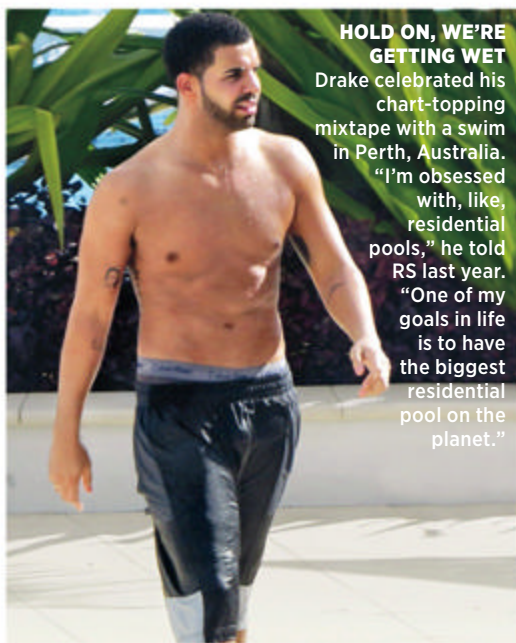
KATY'S TUSCAN TAKEOVER

Katy Perry captured every moment of her tour stop in Italy, taking selfies on a carousel, at the famous Uffizi Gallery as she took in Titian classics, and on the streets of Florence. "Bravo for not letting corporate companies bulldoze your historical streets!" she said.



HOLD ON, WE'RE GETTING WET

Drake celebrated his chart-topping mixtape with a swim in Perth, Australia. "I'm obsessed with, like, residential pools," he told RS last year. "One of my goals in life is to have the biggest residential pool on the planet."



ROYAL VISIT

At a celebration for exiting Attorney General Eric Holder, Aretha Franklin brought tears to President Obama's eyes with a stirring rendition of "America the Beautiful."



DRAGON FLIGHT Imagine Dragons played a surprise gig on a plane. "I felt bad for the people who don't care about Imagine Dragons!" says singer Dan Reynolds.



Kid Rock Hits the Gas

Kid Rock brought "Bawitdaba" and songs from his new album, *First Kiss*, to 147,000 NASCAR fans at the Daytona 500. In June, he'll hit the road for his Cheap Date Tour, with most tickets costing \$20. "We're going to play stripped-down and with strippers," Rock jokes. "People always say, 'I wasn't really a fan until I saw him live.' It goes with 'You're better-looking in person.'"



EDGE OF FROSTBITE

Lady Gaga and fiancé Taylor Kinney dipped into frigid Lake Michigan to raise money for the Special Olympics. "My weave froze!" she said.



MEET THE BOSSES After running into one another at a Philadelphia college basketball game, Bill Murray partied with Rick Ross and Paul Shaffer at a nearby studio.



LITTLE QUEENIES

Ellie Goulding and Taylor Swift hung with Mick Jagger after the Brit Awards. Swift has praised the Stones as "a huge influence on my entire outlook."

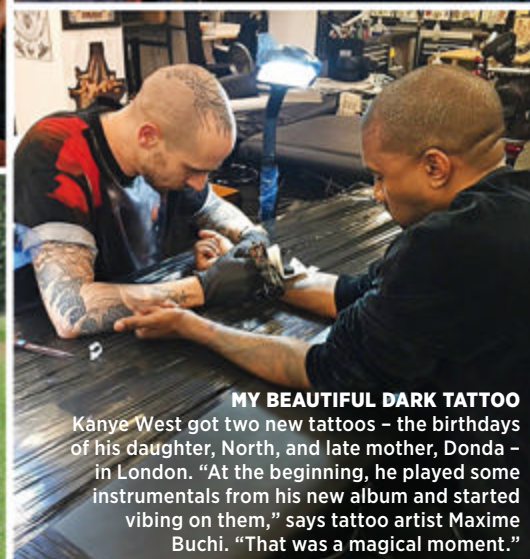


SPECIAL ED After winning Album of the Year at the Brit Awards, Ed Sheeran entertained a VIP crowd including Rita Ora (left) and Orlando Bloom. "It's been a very, very good year for British music!" he said.



SONIC BIKE LANES

Foo Fighters got some fresh air on a tour break in Australia. Onstage, Dave Grohl talked about getting busted for drunk scootering in Oz in 2000.



MY BEAUTIFUL DARK TATTOO

Kanye West got two new tattoos – the birthdays of his daughter, North, and late mother, Donda – in London. "At the beginning, he played some instrumentals from his new album and started vibing on them," says tattoo artist Maxime Buchi. "That was a magical moment."

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JEFF DALY/INVISION/AP IMAGES; INFPHOTO.COM; PAUL HAMPARTSOUMIAN/REX USA; KIM KARDASHIAN/INSTAGRAM; TIM MARSDEN/NEWSPX/REX USA; RICK ROSS/TWITTER; DAVID M. BENNETT/GETTY IMAGES FOR SOHO HOUSE & BACARDI

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THE FATE OF TREES

By the end of the century, climate change will likely reduce the woodlands of the Southwest to weeds and shrubs. And some scientists worry that it may change the nature of forests worldwide

★ By Jeff Tietz ★

IN MAY 2011, A POSTDOCTORAL student at Los Alamos National Laboratory named Park Williams set out to predict the future of the dominant iconic conifers of the American Southwest – the Douglas fir, the piñon pine and the ponderosa pine. As the planet warms, the Southwest is projected to dry out and heat up unusually fast – few places will be more punishing to trees. Williams couldn't rely on climate models, whose representations of terrestrial vegetation remain crudely unspecific. He needed a formula that could accurately weigh the variables of heat, aridity and precipitation, and translate atmospheric projections into a unified measure of forest health.

For decades, all over the planet, heat-aggravated droughts had been killing trees: mountain acacia in Zimbabwe, Mediterranean pine in Greece, Atlas cedar in Morocco, eucalyptus and corymbia in Australia, fir in Turkey and South Korea. A year earlier, a group of ecologists had published the first global overview of forest health. They described droughts whose severity was unequaled in the “last few centuries” and documented “climate-driven episodes of regional-scale forest die-off.” They couldn't prove causality, but if the warming climate was responsible, they warned, “far greater chronic forest stress and mortality risk should be expected in coming decades.”

From a tree's perspective, excessive heat may be as deadly as lack of water. To photosynthesize, a tree opens pores in its

leaves called stomata and inhales CO₂. Solar-charged chemical reactions then transform the CO₂ into carbohydrates – the raw stuff of leaves and wood. During this process, a fraction of the tree's internal water supply evaporates through its stomata, creating the negative pressure that pulls water from the soil into the tree's roots, through its trunk and up to its canopy. But heat juices the rate at which trees lose moisture, and that rate escalates exponentially with temperature – so small temperature increases can cause a photosynthesizing tree to lose dangerous amounts of water. “Forests notice even a one-degree increase in temperature,” says Williams.

In the death scenario, the sky sucks water from the leaves faster than it can be replaced by water in the soil, and the resulting partial vacuum fatally fractures the tree's water column. If a tree closes its stomata to avoid this, shutting down photosynthesis, it risks starvation. Ultimately, the tree's cellular chemistry will fail, but it will often die before that, as its defenses fail; the complexly toxic sap that repels predatory insects dries up. Many insects can detect diminished sap levels within tree bark by scent – they smell drought stress and pheromonally broadcast news of deteriorating tree health. Other defenses – against microbes, for example – may also be compromised. A hotter climate generally means more insects. It also means more, and more intense, wildfires.

Williams amalgamated a millennium's worth of data – the most comprehensive record of forest health ever as-

sembled. Documenting the lives of 10,000 trees, the record spanned the years 1000 to 2007. From it, Williams derived a “forest-drought stress index” (FDSI), the first-ever holistic metric of atmospheric hostility to trees. In a 2013 paper titled “Temperature as a Potent Driver of Regional Forest Drought Stress and Tree Mortality,” Williams predicted that by the 2050s, the climate would turn deadly for many of the Southwest's conifers. By then, he wrote, “the mean forest drought stress will exceed that of the most severe droughts in the past 1,000 years.”

The current climate was testing his conclusion even as Williams was reaching it. In 2000, the Southwest had entered an extreme, ongoing drought – the worst since a 20-year-long drought in the middle of the last century. Conditioned by near-record temperatures, dry soils and a lack of rain, the atmosphere stripped trees of moisture with exceptional force. “That extreme evaporative demand was a hint of what you'd see if you increased temperatures by a couple of degrees, as the models predict for the 2050s,” Williams told me. In terms of precipitation levels, the mid-century drought was worse, but humans had spent the intervening 50 years heating up the planet, and the drought of the 2000s has consequently killed many more trees.

“It was like looking through a telescope into the future to see how forests would respond, and it felt awful,” Williams says. “The result was totally unimaginable: wildfires, bark beetles, a huge reduction in forest growth, massive mortality. In the



THE TREE OF NO LIFE

A scalded juniper is a lonely sentinel in the aftermath of the Las Conchas wildfire in New Mexico's Jemez Mountains, 2011.

afternoons, I'd go on jogs on the trails outside my office and take mental inventory of who was dying and who was living. All over New Mexico, trees keeled over. It was like they'd been transported onto a new planet where climate is entirely different than what they were evolved for."

At the hottest, lowest edge of the local ponderosa pine range, where trees already lived at the limit of what they could tolerate, the future seemed to have arrived. "Watching those trees die, I was aware I was also watching that species' geographic distribution change," Williams told me. "It looked slow to me, but on the time scales that these trees work on, the transition was a flash, like a border being suddenly constructed, and the few unlucky ones on the wrong side being sentenced to death."

Williams' postdoctoral adviser at Los Alamos, Dr. Nate McDowell, an expert on mechanisms of tree death, had been concurrently conducting his own experiments on conifers in the wild. He'd erected a series of clear Plexiglas cylinders around individual piñon pines, and systematically heated and dried them while monitoring their vital signs. Simulating climate con-

ditions for the remainder of the century, McDowell could see in his Plutonian chambers what Williams had foreseen. "The Southwest is going to be a grassland, with the occasional rare tree," McDowell says. "It's going to be a different place. And there's reason to think that's the same for big chunks of the world."

ALL TREES SHARE AN ESSENTIAL anatomy and physiology; they employ corresponding mechanisms to fight insects, to transport water, to make food, to outlast drought. They have the same vulnerabilities. Because global warming outpaces evolutionary adaptation, the question is: Can they survive as they are? The conifer forests of the Southwest, if climate projections are even minimally accurate, cannot, but what about the rest of the world's forests?

That's a critical question, because forests cover more than a quarter of the plan-

et's land, and they help stabilize the climate by pulling immense quantities of CO₂ out of the air. Of the 36 billion metric tons of CO₂ humans emit annually, about 50 percent rises into the atmosphere and about 25 percent falls into the oceans, but around the time that Williams began deriving the FDSI and McDowell was clinically enfeebling trees, no one knew exactly how much of the remaining 25 percent forests drank in.

The answer turned out to be virtually all of it. In August 2011, a team of scientists led by Dr. Yude Pan, a U.S. Forest Service researcher, reported that between 1990 and 2007, forests sequestered about 25 percent of all greenhouse-gas emissions – everything not in the air or seas. "Forests... exert strong control on the evolution of atmospheric CO₂," Pan wrote. They constituted a gargantuan "terrestrial carbon sink."

But forests don't just store carbon, they also emit it; a decomposing tree is a smokestack. Climatologists worry that if forests across the planet deteriorate, they could, on balance, begin releasing as much carbon as they absorb. "Climate

models don't currently represent terrestrial processes very well," one of Pan's collaborators, Dr. Richard Birdsey, told me. "But if the carbon sink in forests fails, a simple speculation is that global temperatures would increase proportionally to the increase of CO₂ concentration, so about 25 percent above current climate projections."

Williams has analyzed climate and tree-health data from the dry forests of inner Asia, including northern China, Mongolia and Russia. "I saw the same thing that I saw in the U.S. Southwest," he told me. "Just a small temperature increase was too much for trees in the driest places to handle." McDowell predicts "massive mortality." By 2100, he believes,

You could add to the endangered list every forest on Earth whose local climate does not get wetter than it is now – without the protection of additional water, heat will eventually turn the air around the forests hostile. Crucially, though, the planet as a whole will get wetter. Global precipitation is estimated to increase roughly 2 percent for every degree Celsius of warming. That will happen largely where it's already wet, and precipitation has begun to intensify in rainy places: Some forests in the eastern U.S. and eastern Canada, for example, are thriving. Most tropical forests will receive more rain, and they account for 70 percent of all the carbon sequestration by forests worldwide. And there will be si-

temperatures, trees burned and died in huge numbers, and their corpses began expelling 10-year or 50-year or 100-year stashes of carbon. Moist, CO₂-fertilized forests may be able to continually recover from severe droughts – regrowth will be climatically supercharged – but staccato, carbon-exuding die-offs, in combination with emissions by all the degraded and dying trees in drier regions, might tip the global forest sink toward carbon neutrality or net-positive carbon emission. "The more forests die, the less carbon they take out of the air, the warmer it gets, and the more forests die," McDowell says. "It's a thermostat gone bad."

But, says Dr. Stephen Pacala, a leading climate modeler and a professor of biolo-

“THE MORE FORESTS DIE, THE LESS CARBON THEY TAKE OUT OF THE AIR, THE WARMER IT GETS, THE MORE FORESTS DIE,” MCDOWELL SAYS. “IT’S A THERMOSTAT GONE BAD.”

rising temperatures could kill more than 50 percent of the conifer forests in the Northern Hemisphere. "I expect global-scale conifer loss," he says, with "major mortality throughout the temperate and southern boreal regions." This would result in a "massive transfer of carbon to a decomposable pool."

By 2020, the worst mountain-pine-beetle outbreak in Canadian history will have added an estimated 270 million metric tons of carbon to the pool. Abetted by uncommonly warm temperatures, the beetles have killed hundreds of millions of trees across swaths of British Columbia cumulatively the size of Missouri. Between 2002 and 2007, and again between 2010 and 2012, the Canadian government reported that insect and wildfire activity had converted its enormous managed forests into carbon sources.

multaneous benefits: Warmth lengthens temperate forests' growing season, and extra CO₂ in the atmosphere acts as tree fertilizer.

But wet forests are not expected to be exempt from drought, and those droughts will likely be more frequent and deadlier. The forests of Quebec and Suriname might grow spectacularly for 50 years or more, absorbing ever more atmospheric carbon, and then endure spectacular injury. "All of a sudden, finally, the 100-year drought hits, but it's 4 degrees Celsius warmer than it was before, and kaboom!" McDowell says. "Random wildfires, huge insect outbreaks, mass death." Mortality will blow through the forests, and the wood-locked carbon will be released in unthinkable quantities.

In 2005 and again in 2010, when a historically intense drought struck the Amazon rainforest after a century of rising

gy at Princeton, no one knows for sure. "If the carbon sink in forests fails, we will see big losses in the weight of the biosphere," he says. "If the sink increases, we'll see big gains. This is a big deal, a qualitative difference – and the stakes are terrifyingly high."

THE BETTER WE UNDERSTAND climate change, the more we seem to find that warming begets warming in unexpected and self-amplifying ways: Implacable heat engines materialize and run independently of all human effort. There are an estimated 1 trillion metric tons of frozen carbon in the soils of the Arctic region – a century's worth of global emissions, twice the amount stored in the global forest, another few Industrial Revolutions. As the planet warms, permafrost thaws and decomposes, sending carbon into the

THREAT ASSESSMENT THE GOOD THE BAD AND THE SCARY

WITH US

- Keystone XL vetoed.**
- Net neutrality enshrined by FCC.**
- Obama: "I loved Spock."**
- Banksy murals appear in Gaza.**
- Freaky "headlights" discovered on dwarf planet Ceres.**
- Climate-denier scientist exposed for taking undisclosed cash from Big Oil.**
- Texas now 10 percent powered by wind.**
- Jeb on legalization: "States ought to have that right to do it."**

air and further warming the planet. Higher temperatures also kindle increasingly intense and frequent wildfires in high-latitude forests, to quadruple effect. Fire releases carbon directly; it burns off the insulating upper layer of vegetation, exposing more permafrost to warm air; it blackens the trees and land, which consequently absorb more solar radiation; and its soot can settle on and darken snow and ice sheets to the north, which then also absorb more solar radiation. Each effect speeds warming, in turn multiplying wildfires. Other major feedbacks, still insufficiently modeled, are in operation around the globe. Pacala calls these kinds of feedbacks "monsters behind the door." "It's just a question of when they come out," he says.

In theory, if global warming accelerated uncontrollably and the most extreme temperature projections proved preposterously low, average evaporative demand could suction water from the world's trees with such magnitude that their hydraulics would implode. Precipitation would be irrelevant because the uptake rate through any root system is finite – trees wouldn't be able to replenish their water supply fast enough to offset negative pressure, and their pipes would break.

"The pessimist's case is that every tree is tuned to deal with only a very specific range of drought stress and evaporative demand," Williams told me. "And as warming continues, trees constantly see new records being set in terms of evaporative demand, and eventually they're all carried outside of their range of survivability."

But neither Williams nor any other scientist I spoke with thinks the Earth will lose all of its forests. There may be hope in trees' diverse genetic capabilities. They can reduce water and carbohydrate demand by

strategically self-amputating, for example, or by radically shifting resources to root systems so that growth occurs profusely below ground while canopies retract.

There are other potentially mitigating factors: Trees become more water-efficient in CO₂-rich air (they're pulling in so much carbon per second that they can limit



WOOD WARRIORS

Scientists Williams, McDowell and Allen (from left) think the Southwest's recent drought is a grim preview of the future.

water loss); forests exert some control over local hydrological cycles (exhaled water vapor increases humidity) and could perhaps carve their own moderate microclimates out of the extreme atmosphere; and species with ultralight seeds designed for wind dispersal might find a way to slowly migrate north as temperatures crest.

And plenty of forests will survive in climatic pockets ecologists call "refugia."

Imagine a mountainside above the cold Pacific, or a high-altitude, perpetually shaded valley with year-round stream flow, into which cool night air pours and then pools.

Undeniably, though, tree casualties in the 21st century will be high. Many forests in the drier parts of the world will surrender and disappear – as is observably happening – and will be replaced by scrubrier, more promiscuous organisms: fast-growing grasses and shrubs that can better tolerate heat, drought and fire. A prominent research ecologist at the U.S. Geological Survey, Dr. Craig D. Allen, refers to a future dominated by such ecotypes as "weed world." The ecological reorganizations, Williams has written, will be "unfamiliar to modern civilization." In the U.S. Southwest, droughts, wildfires and insect infestations have already created broad landscapes of dying trees destined to become brushland. By the second half of the 21st century, decades of percussive heat waves will have segued into a permanent heat drought, and brushy flora will have largely supplanted conifer forests. The desert floor will have climbed the slopes of the mountains. El Paso will move to Albuquerque, and Albuquerque will move to Colorado Springs.

That remade landscape might seem ugly to the old eyes of the millennials – a degenerate ecosystem, an affront to ponderosa groves transpiring in memories. But Southwesterners born in 2045, young during the time of greatest disturbance, of spontaneous flame and beetle hordes and in-burst wooden veins, might find the Southwest of 2075 – arid-clean, horizon-inclusive, containably fiery – far preferable to the charnel forests of their earliest recollections.



AGAINST US

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The Trials of Kendrick Lamar

How a Compton loner pushed past his dark moments and insecurities to become hip-hop's most exciting rapper *By* JOSH EELLS

PHOTOGRAPH BY THEO WENNER



cats,” Lamar says. He nods to Mingo, a Compton-born sweetheart who is roughly the size of the truck he arrived in: “I don’t need to hire a bodyguard. Look how fucking big he is!” ¶ The burger joint, Tam’s, sits at the corner

of Rosecrans and Central, a famous local spot recently made infamous when Suge Knight allegedly ran over two men with his truck in the parking lot, killing one of them. “Homey died right here,” G-Weed says, pointing to a dark spot on the asphalt. “That security camera caught everything. They’re building a case.”

Lamar grew up just six blocks from here, in a little blue three-bedroom house at 1612 137th St. Across the street is the Louisiana Fried Chicken where he used to get the three-piece meal with fries and lemonade; over there is the Rite Aid where he walked to buy milk for his little brothers. Tam’s was another hangout. “This is where I seen my second murder, actually,” he says. “Eight years old, walking home from McNair Elementary. Dude was in the drive-thru ordering his food, and homey ran up, *boom boom* – smoked him.” He saw his first murder at age five, a teenage drug dealer gunned down outside Lamar’s apartment building. “After that,” he says, “you just get numb to it.”

It’s almost noon, but Lamar is just starting his day – having spent a late night in the studio scrambling to finish his new album, *To Pimp a Butterfly*, which has to be done in five days. He’s dressed casually in a gray hoodie, maroon sweatpants, and white socks with black slides, but recognizable enough that an old lady in line decides to tease him while complaining about the heat inside. “Y’all need to put the air conditioner on,” she calls to the manager. “Kendrick Lamar is here!”

Lamar may be a two-time Grammy winner with a platinum debut executive-produced by Dr. Dre, and with fans from Kanye

DRIZZLY SUNDAY MORNING IN COMPTON, the sky an un-California-ish gray. Into the parking lot of a local hamburger stand pulls a chromed-out black Mercedes SUV, driven by 27-year-old Kendrick Lamar, arguably the most talented rapper of his generation. There are a half-dozen guys from the neighborhood waiting to meet him: L, Turtle, G-Weed. “I grew up with all these

West to Taylor Swift. But here at Tam’s, he’s also Kendrick Duckworth, Paula and Kenny’s son. Inside, a middle-aged woman who just left church comes up and gives him a hug, and he buys lunch for a cart-toting lady he knows to be a harmless crack addict. (“She used to chase us with sticks and stuff,” he says.) Outside, an old man in a motorized wheelchair scoots over to introduce himself. He says he moved here in 1951, when Compton was still majority-white. “Back in the day, we had the baddest cars in L.A.,” he says. “I just wanted you to know where you came from. It’s a hell of a neighborhood.”

On his breakthrough album, 2012’s *good kid, m.A.A.d City*, Lamar made his name by chronicling this neighborhood, vividly evoking a specific place (this same stretch of Rosecrans) and a specific time (in the summer of 2004, between 10th and 11th grade). It was a concept album about adolescence, told with cinematic

precision through the eyes of someone young enough to recall every detail (as in: “Me and my niggas four deep in a white Toyota/A quarter tank of gas, one pistol, one orange soda”).

Lamar’s parents moved here from Chicago in 1984, three years before Kendrick was born. His dad, Kenny Duckworth, was reportedly running with a South Side street gang called the Gangster Disciples, so his mom, Paula Oliver, issued an ultimatum. “She said, ‘I can’t fuck with you if you ain’t trying to better yourself,’” Lamar recounts. “We can’t be in the streets forever.” They stuffed their clothes into two black garbage bags and boarded a train to California with \$500. “They were going to

go to San Bernardino,” Lamar says. “But my Auntie Tina was in Compton. She got ‘em a hotel until they got on their feet, and my mom got a job at McDonald’s.” For the first couple of years, they slept in their car or motels, or in the park when it was hot enough. “Eventually, they saved enough money to get their first apartment, and that’s when they had me.”

Lamar has a lot of good memories of Compton as a kid: riding bikes, doing back flips off friends’ roofs, sneaking into the living room during his parents’ house parties. (“I’d catch him in the middle of the dance floor with his shirt off,” his mom says. “Like, ‘What the...? Get back in that room!’”) Then there’s one of his earliest memories – the afternoon of April 29th, 1992, the first day of the South Central riots.

Kendrick was four. “I remember riding with my pops down Bullis Road, and looking out the window and seeing motherfuckers just *running*,” he says. “I can see smoke. We stop, and my pops goes into the AutoZone and comes out rolling four tires. I know he didn’t buy them. I’m like, ‘What’s going on?’” (Says Kenny, “We were all taking stuff. That’s the way it was in the riots.”)

“Then we get to the house,” Lamar continues, “and him and my uncles are like, ‘We fixing to get this, we fixing to get that. We fixing to get *all* this shit!’ I’m thinking they’re robbing. There’s some real mayhem going on in L.A. Then, as time progresses, I’m watching the news, hearing about Rodney King and all this. I said to my mom, ‘So the police beat up a black man, and now everybody’s mad? OK. I get it now.’”

W

E’VE BEEN SITTING on the patio a while when Lamar sees someone he knows at the bus stop. “Matt

Jeezy! What up, bro?” Matt Jeezy nods. “That’s my boy,” Lamar says. “He’s part of the inner circle.” Lamar has a few friends like this, guys he’s known all his life. But often he’d rather be by himself.

“He was always a loner,” Kendrick’s mom says. Lamar agrees: “I was always in the corner of the room watching.” He has two little brothers and one younger sister, but until he was seven, he was an only child. He was so precocious his parents nicknamed him Man-Man. “I grew up fast as fuck,” he says. “My moms used to walk me home from school – we didn’t have no car – and we’d talk from the county building to the welfare office.” “He would ask me questions about Section 8 and the Housing Authority, so I’d explain it to him,” his mom says. “I was keeping it real.”

Contributing editor JOSH EELLS wrote about corrupt Texas police in January.

“

I’ve woken up feeling guilty, angry. As a kid from Compton, you can have all the success but question your worth.”



The Duckworths survived on welfare and food stamps, and Paula did hair for \$20 a head. His dad had a job at KFC, but at a certain point, says Lamar, “I realized his work schedule wasn’t really adding up.” It wasn’t until later that he suspected Kenny was probably making money off the streets. “They wanted to keep me innocent,” Lamar says now. “I love them for that.” To this day, he and his dad have never discussed it. “I don’t know what type of demons he has,” Lamar says, “but I don’t wanna bring them shits up.” (Says Kenny, “I don’t want to talk about that bad time. But I did what I had to do.”)

There’s a famous story from Tom Petty’s childhood in which a 10-year-old Tom sees Elvis shooting a movie near his hometown in Florida, takes one look at the white Cadillac and the girls, and decides to become a rock star on the spot. Lamar has a similar story – only for him it’s sitting on his dad’s shoulders outside the Compton Swap Meet, age eight, watching Dr. Dre and 2Pac shoot a video for “California Love.” “I want to say they were in a white Bentley,” Lamar says. (It was actually black.) “These motorcycle cops trying to conduct traffic but one almost scraped the car, and Pac stood up on the passenger seat, like, ‘Yo, what the fuck!’” He laughs. “Yelling at the police, just like on his motherfucking songs. He gave us what we wanted.”

Being a rapper was far from preordained for Lamar. As late as middle school, he had a noticeable stutter. “Just certain words,”

Front-Seat Freestyle

In Pasadena last month, Lamar kept a diary for this LP: “I don’t want to forget how this feels.”

he says. “It came when I was excited or in trouble.” He loved basketball – he was short, but quick – and dreamed of making it to the NBA. But in seventh grade, an English teacher named Mr. Inge turned him on to poetry – rhymes, metaphors, double-entendres – and Lamar fell in love. “You could put all your feelings down on a sheet of paper, and they’d make sense to you,” he says. “I liked that.”

At home, Lamar started writing non-stop. “We used to wonder what he was doing with all that paper,” his dad says. “I thought he was doing homework! I didn’t know he was writing lyrics.” “I had never heard him say profanity before,” says his mom. “Then I found his little rap lyrics, and it was all ‘Eff you.’ ‘D-i-c-k.’ I’m like, ‘Oh, my God! Kendrick’s a cusser!’”

An A student, Lamar flirted with the idea of going to college. “I could have went. I should have went.” (He still might: “It’s always in the back of my mind. It’s not too late.”) But by the time he was in high school, he was running with a bad crowd. This is the crew he raps about on *good kid, m.A.A.d City* – the ones doing robberies, home invasions, running from the cops.

Once his mom found a bloody hospital gown, from a trip he took to the ER with “one of his little homeys who got smoked.”

Another time she found him curled up crying in the front yard. She thought he was sad because his grandmother had just died: “I didn’t know somebody had shot at him.” One night, the police knocked on their door and said he was involved in an incident in their neighborhood, and his parents, in a bout of tough love, kicked him out for two days. “And that’s a scary thing,” Lamar says, “because you might not come back.”

AFTER A COUPLE OF hours, the mood on Rosecrans starts to shift. An ambulance roars by, sirens blaring. In the middle of the street, a homeless man is shouting at passing cars. Lamar starts to grow uneasy, his eyes glancing at the corners. I ask if everything’s OK. “It’s the temperature,” he says. “It’s, uh, raising a little bit.” A few minutes later, one of his friends – who’s been cruising back and forth on his bicycle all afternoon, “patrolling the perimeter” – calls out, “Rollers!” and a few seconds later, two L.A. County sheriff cruisers round the corner. “There they go,” Lamar says, as they hit their lights and take off.

As a teenager, “the majority of my interactions with police were not good,” Lamar says. “There were a few good ones who were actually protecting the community. But then you have ones from the Valley. They never met me in their life, but

since I'm a kid in basketball shorts and a white T-shirt, they wanna slam me on the hood of the car. Sixteen years old," he says, nodding toward the street. "Right there by that bus stop. Even if he's not a good kid, that don't give you the right to slam a minor on the ground, or pull a pistol on him."

Lamar says he's had police pull guns on him on two occasions. The first was when he was 17, cruising around Compton with his friend Moose. He says a cop spotted their flashy green Camaro and pulled them over, and when Moose couldn't find his license fast enough, the cop pulled a gun. "He literally put the beam on my boy's head," Lamar recalls. "I remember driving off in silence, feeling violated, and him being so angry a tear dropped from his eye." The story of the second time is murkier: Lamar won't say what he and his friends were up to, only that a cop drew his gun and they ran. "We was in the wrong," he admits. "But we just kids. It's not worth pulling your gun out over. Especially when we running away."

Friends of his weren't so lucky. Just after midnight on June 13th, 2007, officers from the LAPD's Southeast Division responded to a domestic-violence call on East 120th Street, about five minutes from Lamar's house. There they found his good friend D.T. allegedly holding a 10-inch knife. According to police, D.T. charged, and an officer opened fire, killing him. "It never really quite added up," Lamar says. "But here's the crazy thing. Normally when we find out somebody got killed, the first thing we say is 'Who did it? Where we gotta go?' It's a gang altercation. But this time it was the police – the biggest gang in California. You'll never win against them."

On an otherwise positive song called "HiiiPower," from his 2011 mixtape *Section.80*, Lamar rapped, "I got my finger on the motherfucking pistol/Aim it at a pig, Charlotte's Web is going to miss you." It's an unsettling line, especially coming from a rapper who often subverts gangster tropes but rarely trafficks in them. "I was angry," he says. "To be someone with a good heart, and to still be harassed as a kid... it took a toll on me. Soon you're just saying, 'Fuck everything.' That line was me getting those frustrations out. And I'm glad I could get them out with a pen and a paper."

About three years ago, Lamar was flipping through the channels on his tour bus when he saw on the news a report that a 16-year-old named Trayvon Martin had been shot to death in a Florida subdivision. "It just put a whole new anger inside me," Lamar says. "It made me remember how I felt. Being harassed, my partners being killed." He grabbed a pen and start-

ed writing, and within an hour, he had rough verses for a new song, "The Blacker the Berry":

*Coming from the bottom of mankind
My hair is nappy, my dick is big
My nose is round and wide
You hate me, don't you?*



Compton to Courtside

(1) With his mother, Paula, in 1989. (2) At a Lakers game with mentor Dr. Dre in 2010. (3) With longtime girlfriend Whitney, whom Lamar has called "my best friend."

You hate my people

Your plan is to terminate my culture...."

But as Lamar wrote, he also started thinking about his own time in the streets, and "all the wrong I've done." So he started writing a new verse, in which he turned the microscope on himself. How can he criticize America for killing young black men, he asks, when young black men are often just as good at it? As the song's narrator put it, "Why did I weep when Trayvon Martin was in the street/ When gangbanging make me kill a nigga blacker than me?/Hypocrite."

When it was finally released last month, the song sparked a rash of think pieces, with some listeners saying Lamar was ignoring the real problem: the systemic racism that created the conditions for black-on-black crime in the first place. Coupled with a recent *Billboard* interview in which Lamar seemed to suggest that some of the responsibility for preventing killings like that of Michael Brown lay with black people themselves, some

sonal standpoint. I'm talking about gangbanging."

He grew up surrounded by gangs. Some of his close friends were West Side Pirus, a local Blood affiliate, and his mom says her brothers were Compton Crips. One of his uncles did a 15-year stretch for robbery, and another is locked up now for the same; his Uncle Tony, meanwhile, was shot in the head at a burger stand when Kendrick was a boy. But Lamar says he was taught that change starts from within. "My moms always told me: 'How long you gonna play the victim?'" he says. "I can say I'm mad and I hate everything, but nothing really changes until I change myself. So no matter how much bullshit we've been through as a community, I'm strong enough to say fuck that, and acknowledge myself and my own struggles."

W

HEN LAMAR RELEASED the new album's first single, "i," last September, many fans weren't sure what to make

of it. A blast of pop positivity that samples an Isley Brothers hit recently heard soundtracking a Swiffer commercial, it felt like an odd move for Lamar, who's known for more complex fare. People

called it corny, mocked its feel-good, “Happy”-style chorus (“I love myself!”). “I know people might think that means I’m conceited or something,” Lamar says. “No. It means I’m depressed.”

Lamar is sitting in the Santa Monica recording studio where he made much of his new album, dressed in a charcoal sweatsuit and Reeboks. His baseball cap is pulled low over his sprouting braids, and he speaks softly and thoughtfully, with long pauses between sentences.

“I’ve woken up in the morning and felt like shit,” he says. “Feeling guilty. Feeling angry. Feeling regretful. As a kid from Compton, you can get all the success in the world and still question your worth.”

Lamar says he intended “i” as a “Keep Ya Head Up”-style message for his friends in the penitentiary. But he also wrote it for himself, to ward off dark thoughts. “My partner Jason Estrada told me, ‘If you don’t attack it, it will attack you,’” Lamar says. “If you sit around moping, feeling sad and stagnant, it’s gonna eat you alive. I had to make that record. It’s a reminder. It makes me feel good.”

Lamar also points out that the fans who scratched their heads at “i” had yet to hear “u” – its counterpart on the album. “‘i’ is the answer to ‘u,’” he says. The latter is four and a half minutes of devastating honesty, with Lamar almost sobbing over a discordant beat, berating himself about his lack of confidence and calling himself “a fucking failure.” It’s the sound of a man staring into the mirror and hating what he sees, punctuated by a self-aware hook: “Loving you is complicated.”

“That was one of the hardest songs I had to write,” he says. “There’s some very dark moments in there. All my insecurities and selfishness and letdowns. That shit is depressing as a motherfucker.”

“But it helps, though,” he says. “It helps.”

Lamar has documented his inner struggles before, most notably on “Swimming Pools,” from *good kid*, which explores his past troubles with alcohol and his family’s history of addiction. But once he got successful, he says, things got more difficult, not less. One of his biggest issues was self-esteem – accepting that he deserved to be where he was. And some of that came from his discomfort around white people.

“I’m going to be 100 percent real with you,” Lamar says. “In all my days of schooling, from preschool all the way up to 12th grade, there was

not one white person in my class. Literally zero.” Before he started touring, he had barely left Compton; when he finally did, the culture shock threw him. “Imagine only discovering that when you’re 25,” Lamar says. “You’re around people you don’t know how to communicate with. You don’t speak the same lingo. It brings confusion and insecurity. Questioning how did I get here, what am I doing? That was a cycle I had to break quickly. But at the same time, you’re excited, because you’re in a different environment. The world keeps going outside the neighborhood.”

The week *good kid* was released, Lamar began keeping a diary. “It really came from conversations I had with Dre,” he says. “Hearing him tell stories about all these moments, and how it went by like *that*” – he snaps. “I didn’t want to forget how I was feeling when my album dropped, or when I went back to Compton.”

Lamar ended up filling multiple notebooks. “There’s a lot of weird shit in there,” he says. “Lot of drawings, visuals.” Whereas *good kid* was an exercise in millennial nostalgia, *To Pimp a Butterfly* is firmly in the present. It’s his take on what it means to be young and black in America today – and more specifically, what it means to be Kendrick Lamar, navigating success, expectation and his own self-doubt.

Musically, the album – at least the half that he’s comfortable sharing so far – is adventurous, borrowing from free jazz and 1970s funk. Lamar says he listened to a lot of Miles Davis and Parliament. His producer Mark “Sounwave” Spears, who’s known Lamar since he was 16, says, “Every producer I’ve ever met was sending me stuff – but there was a one-in-a-million chance you could send us a beat that actually fit what we were doing.” Ali says Lamar works synesthetically – “He talks in colors all the time: ‘Make it sound purple.’ ‘Make it sound light green.’”

But of all the album’s colors, the most prominent is black. There are allusions to the entire sweep of African-American history, from the diaspora to the cotton fields to the Harlem renaissance to Obama. “Mortal Man” (inspired in part by a 2014 trip to South Africa) name-checks leaders from Mandela to MLK all the way back to Moses. On “King Kunta,” a stomping blast of James Brown funk, he imagines himself as the titular slave from *Roots*, shouting the punchline “Everybody wanna cut the legs off him!/Black man taking no losses!”

Hanging over it all, of course, are the tragedies of the past three years: Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice. Says Sounwave, “To me, the album is perfect for right now. If the world was happy, maybe we’d give you a happy album. But right now, we are not happy.”

Lamar – who calls the album “fearful, honest and unapologetic” – is coy about what the title means. “Just putting the word ‘pimp’ next to ‘butterfly’...” he says, then laughs. “It’s a trip. That’s something that will be a phrase forever. It’ll be taught in college courses – I truly believe that.” I ask if he’s the pimp or the butterfly, and he just smiles. “I could be both,” he says.

ON THE LAST DAY OF FEBRUARY, Lamar and two dozen loved ones are gathered at a \$6 million mansion in Calabasas, for a surprise birthday party for Sounwave. The estate belongs to “Top Dawg” Tiffeth, part of a group of properties so exclusive they’re protected by two security gates, the second presumably to keep out the riff-raff inhabiting the mansions inside the first. NBA star Paul Pierce lives across the street, and multiple Kardashians live around the block. “There’s probably a million dollars in this driveway,” says Lamar’s tour manager, a friendly dude named retOne, as he surveys the Audis, Benzes and Range Rovers out front.

Lamar lives down the coast with his longtime girlfriend, Whitney (he has called her his “best friend”), in a tri-level condo he rents in the South Bay, on the water. He still hasn’t splurged on much: So far his biggest purchase is a relatively modest house in the suburbs east of L.A., which he bought for his parents more than a year ago. Top Dawg says that at first his mom didn’t want to take it, because it meant giving up their Section 8 status. Kendrick had to reassure her: “It’s OK, Mom. We’re good.” (“It was hard times, and we’ve been through a lot,” says Kenny. “But like Drake said: ‘We started from the bottom, now we’re here.’”)

In the kitchen, the girls are snacking and chatting, while the guys are in the home theater watching the new Kobe documentary. In the dining room, Lamar is talking to Sounwave and his manager Dave Free, trying to make last-minute changes to the record that’s due out in two weeks.

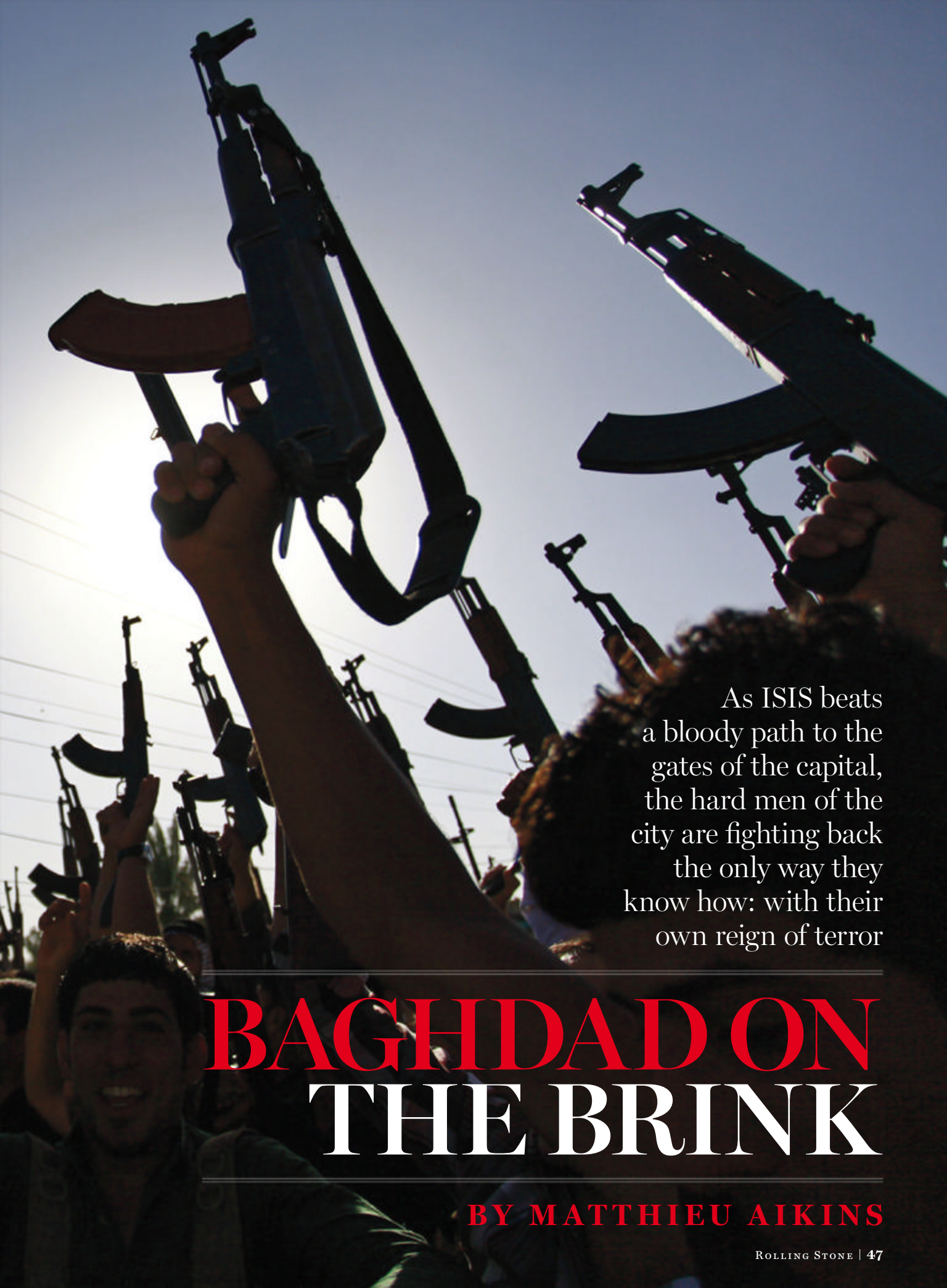
Eventually, Whitney comes in and rests her hand on Lamar’s shoulder. “They’re about to blow out the candles,” she says. Everyone moves into the kitchen to sing “Happy Birthday” to Sounwave, and Lamar stands beside Whitney, his arm around her waist. They look happy. Sounwave is about to blow out the candles when someone tells him to make a wish – but before he can, Lamar jumps in and makes one for him. “I wish,” he says, smiling, “for hot beats!”



It’s OK, Mom,” said Lamar. She was worried about losing Section 8 status when he bought her a house. “We’re good.”



Shiite tribesmen
prepare to join the
fight against ISIS
outside Baghdad.



As ISIS beats
a bloody path to the
gates of the capital,
the hard men of the
city are fighting back
the only way they
know how: with their
own reign of terror

BAGHDAD ON THE BRINK

BY MATTHIEU AIKINS

IF YOU VISITED THE Interior Ministry compound in Baghdad during the holy month of Muharram this past fall, you would be forgiven for thinking that Iraq, like its neighbor Iran, is a country whose official religion is Shiite Islam. The ministry's walls are emblazoned with iconography and slogans paying tribute to the Shiite martyr Imam Hussain, as are police stations and vehicles throughout the capital: black banners with scarlet lettering, and the portraits of a smoldering, bearded Hussain staring down at the faithful.

In an office decorated with maps of Baghdad and Shiite posters, I find the man with possibly the ministry's hardest job: Col. Riyadh al-Musawi, commander of the Baghdad Falcons, the city's premier bomb squad. The rise of the militant group known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, left the city under assault for months and meant bloody, dangerous work for Musawi and his men, with car bombs, suicide attacks and mortar strikes tearing into crowded marketplaces and mosques.

This late-fall morning, Musawi is looking even more worn than usual. The bags under his eyes seem to droop toward the comfort of his plush mustache. He's been moonlighting outside the city with a Shiite militia – one of the many armed religious brigades that took up the defense of Baghdad after the collapse of the army this past summer. Last night, Musawi helped defuse a tangle of IED traps that ISIS had left behind during a retreat. “They buried them in the desert, in a daisy chain,” he says, pulling out a tangle of pressure-activated triggers. “It was a sleepless night.”

Musawi is a career military officer and a patriot, someone who doesn't shirk from dangerous work and is well-respected by his men because of it – and yet he's spending his nights working for a private religious militia. His unofficial job highlights the central dilemma for President Obama as he seeks a congressional mandate for the war with ISIS: Iraq has become a militia state, with its military operations led, in many cases, by the same Iranian-backed commanders who once fought the U.S. military. And while the militias have been effective at pushing back ISIS, they have also deepened the sectarian nature of the

conflict, making prospects for any reconciliation between Sunnis and Shiites – and Iraq's hopes for peace – even more distant.

As the Iraqi government, backed by U.S. airstrikes and military trainers, begins an all-out offensive against ISIS, the Obama administration seems caught in a bind. “We are deeply concerned by reports of abuse that we have seen associated with some volunteer militia forces and, in some instances, by Iraqi security forces,” says Jen Psaki, the State Department's spokeswoman. “We have received assurances from the government of Iraq and the Iraqi security forces that they will use U.S. equipment in accordance with U.S. law and our bilateral agreements.”

But the Obama administration has also argued that its program to supply weapons to the Iraqi government should be eligible for an exemption from arms-control laws. U.S. weapons have already fallen into the hands of Shiite militias, and by supporting – inadvertently or not – paramilitary groups whose excesses are approaching the worst abuses of the sectarian civil war in 2006, the U.S. risks helping to perpetrate the same violence and state corruption that led to ISIS's stunning rise last year.

The door opens and Musawi's boss, Brig. Gen. Jabbar, walks in. A portly man who loves to show foreign visitors slide shows of himself at foreign conferences, Jabbar seems flustered, embarrassed, perhaps,

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE THAT five years ago, Iraq seemed to be on the mend. According to the Iraq Body Count project, at least 17,000 Iraqi civilians were killed in 2014, the worst year by far since the peak of the violence in 2006 and 2007. The Bush administration, having belatedly realized that it had triggered a full-scale civil war by invading Iraq, managed, with the troop surge, to guarantee a sort of victor's peace by convincing Sunnis they could reject Al Qaeda and still survive. “Thanks to the extraordinary sacrifices of our troops and the determination of our diplomats, we are hopeful about Iraq's future,” Obama said in March 2011, as the U.S. prepared to withdraw its combat forces.

But the optimism of those times belied the fragility of the political accord between Shiite and Sunni, as well as the tremendously corrupt and patchwork nature of the Iraqi state. In Hanash Square, a bustling hub on weekends for Baghdad's intelligentsia, I meet with Ali Sumery, a diminutive young television director in a dapper brimmed hat and scarf. During the 2010 national elections, Sumery, a longtime political activist, threw his support to the Iraqiya coalition of Ayad Allawi – an opportunist surrounded by opportunists, but at least one who espoused a sort of nonsectarian liberalism. Allawi's

By indirectly arming Shiite militias, the U.S. risks perpetuating the bloody sectarian violence that led to the stunning rise of ISIS last year.

by the hulking man with a bristling beard and the black turban and cream tunic of a Shiite cleric trailing in his wake. Jabbar winces as he introduces Sheikh Sayed Maher, a leader in Asaib Ahl al-Haq, or the League of the Righteous – one of the most notorious militias battling ISIS.

Maher, at least, is pleased to see me. As Jabbar and Musawi confer, he hands me a phone and plays videos of himself dressed in camouflage and firing a machine gun. “We're fighting Daesh,” he says, using the pejorative term for ISIS, derived from its initials in Arabic. As he leaves with Jabbar, he invites me to come visit him.

Maher's group allegedly receives aid and military support from Iran and is infamous for its rumored criminality. Afterward, I ask Col. Musawi what he thinks of the idea of visiting Sheikh Maher. He chuckles grimly. “If you visit them, maybe they'll sell you to Daesh.”

coalition managed to win two more seats than that of the incumbent, Nouri al-Maliki of Dawa, a religious Shiite party. But in the political struggle that followed, Maliki succeeded in retaining power, with the tacit assent of both the U.S. and Iranian governments. Sumery and his friends were disappointed but felt emboldened enough to protest what they saw as Maliki's increasing authoritarianism and sectarian politics. “They were slicing up the government like a cake,” Sumery says. “They weren't speaking as leaders for all of Iraq. They were speaking as leaders of sects.”

The American occupation had enlisted religious leaders and exiled carpetbaggers to help run the country, and a cancerous system of party-based patronage had grown within the Iraqi state. It flourished during Maliki's second term. Each ministry was given to a particular party,

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CIVIL WAR

Above: Shiite militias training – as their power grows, kidnappings and murder have soared in Baghdad. When ISIS seized Iraqi bases, captured soldiers were slaughtered (right).



which doled out positions to its cronies. As a result, Iraq's public institutions – which had already atrophied under international sanctions and Saddam Hussein's dictatorship – became parodies of corruption. One professor at a major university in Baghdad tells me that Ph.D.s from his faculty were readily available for \$10,000.

After protests broke out in December 2010 across the Arab world against repressive, corrupt governments, Sumery joined thousands of demonstrators on February 25th, 2011, in a square bearing the same name as Egypt's famous Tahrir. Maliki responded by ordering Iraqi security forces to attack the protest. "We were planning to occupy Tahrir like they did in Egypt," says Sumery, "but the government had such a brutal crackdown that we couldn't."

Sumery was caught by the police and, along with a friend, another prominent activist, named Hadi al-Mahdi, was beaten and thrown in the trunk of a Humvee. A public outcry led to their release the next day, but in the following months, further protests were met with more violence. Then, on September 8th, Mahdi was murdered in his home by unknown assailants. "He was killed the day before we were planning a demonstration," says Sumery. Under the threat of such deadly force, the protests tapered off. "We were worried that Maliki would try to establish a dictatorship, and he did."

Under Maliki's watch, the Shiite militias gained power and Iraq's nascent civil society came under pressure from their repressive religious agenda. "They threaten us all the time and call us by phone," says Ahlam al-Obeidi, a spokeswoman for the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq, one of the country's leading human rights NGOs. "They call us prostitutes," adds Obeidi, a grandmother.

One of the militias' targets were gays and lesbians in Baghdad. Downtown, I meet a young man I'll call Ahmed. A slender 25-year-old who loves Mariah Carey, Ahmed had escaped an abusive father by pursuing a career as an actor. His break had come when he was cast to play a gay character on a groundbreaking TV series in 2009. But the role attracted the attention of neighborhood militiamen, who had already suspected his sexuality. "Let's be honest," he says with a sad smile, "you can tell by the way that I walk and talk."

Not long after the show aired, he found a local commander and his henchmen waiting for him at his bus stop. He says that they forced him into their car at

gunpoint and took him to an abandoned construction site, where they made him strip. Then the militiamen took turns: One put a gun to his head, the other held him down and the third raped him. They filmed the attack and cursed him for being gay. When they were finished, they stuffed rope and glue up his anus and dropped him, naked and bleeding, in front of his grandmother's house. Still, he considers himself lucky to be alive; many of his friends have been killed, including one he says he witnessed having his head smashed open on a curb. The threat from ISIS is even worse; the militant group recently put out videos showing members throwing men accused of homosexuality off buildings. Ahmed is hoping to get accepted as a refugee in the United States. (In February, according to lawyers helping him with his case, his boyfriend was beheaded in Baghdad.) "There's no life for gays in Iraq," he says.

EVEN AS MALIKI'S GOVERNMENT began increasingly brutal crackdowns on internal dissent, the Obama administration was claiming victory and pulling out.

On December 14th, 2011, Obama told a military audience at Fort Bragg that the U.S.'s war in Iraq was coming to an end. "We're leaving behind a sovereign, stable and self-reliant Iraq," he said. "The war in Iraq will soon belong to history." His words would prove to be as far from reality as his predecessor's 2003 "mission accomplished." Despite the colossal effort and money spent on building Iraq's security forces, a fundamental rot lurked at their core, one that would eventually lead to a near-total collapse.

The roots of that failure go back to the aftermath of the invasion, when L. Paul Bremer, the Bush administration's civilian official charged with overseeing the occupation, dismissed the entire Iraqi army. Besides providing recruits for the insurgency, Bremer's rash decision meant that a new force would have to be built from

scratch in the midst of a civil war. Over the next nine years, that effort would consume 25 billion U.S.-taxpayer dollars, around a third of the total spent reconstructing Iraq, fueling corruption on an epic scale, as the Iraqi brass embezzled everything they could.

Meanwhile, the army and police were full of what are locally termed *fadhaiyin*, or “spacemen.” Some existed only on paper, their salaries pocketed by senior officers, while others split paychecks with their leaders in order to remain perpetually absent. “It’s not about religion or politics, it’s about money,” says Hosham, a shopkeeper in Baghdad who joined the army around 2006. His unit is deployed in western Iraq, but he visits only when he needs to come to an arrangement with a new officer about his pay – around \$1,200 per month. “It’s a business,” says Hosham.

In some battalions, spacemen comprise up to half the force, says an Iraqi federal police colonel, whom I’ll call Khalid. He tells me he served as a fighter pilot in Saddam’s army and says that corruption within the officer corps had become rampant in a way that it never was before the U.S. invasion. “They are absolutely unafraid to discuss it openly,” he says. “The way to get rich is to take from your soldiers and give to your superiors.”

Ranks were bought and sold. Soldiers were issued shoddy equipment. The most embarrassing case was \$38 million worth of “bomb-detection wands” that were, in fact, based on novelty golf-ball finders and sold by a British entrepreneur who was later convicted of fraud. Despite a public scandal, you can still see the useless wands being used today at checkpoints in Baghdad. With such widespread corruption among senior officers, morale among the rank and file plummeted. “When you tell a soldier to fight, he’ll say, ‘Why should I fight so that my commander can get rich?’” says Khalid.

Meanwhile, a new and far more violent insurgency was gaining strength in the brutal sectarian civil war raging in neighboring Syria. In April 2013, the group known as Al Qaeda in Iraq, once led by the Jordanian jihadist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, rebranded itself as ISIS. The movement’s leadership was the hardcore Sunni insurgents who had survived the American occupation – many of them, including its current head, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, spent time in Camp Bucca, the main U.S. military prison, located just outside of Baghdad. Maliki’s increasingly hard-line policies created fertile recruiting ground for ISIS among Iraq’s Sunnis, many of whom, ironically, now blame the U.S. for withdrawing too rapidly. “If the Americans had stayed, they could have kept their promises,” says Sheikh Ammar al-Azzawy, a prominent Sunni leader in Baghdad. Instead, Maliki failed to deliver on pledges to

include Sunnis in the security forces, offering them instead menial government positions. “They were trying to turn us into street cleaners,” says Azzawy.

In 2013, in an effort to consolidate a power base among Shiites, Maliki ordered several bloody crackdowns on Sunni protests, which helped pitch parts of the Anbar province into open rebellion. ISIS seized the opportunity and moved in. “The people in these areas, when they’re treated so brutally, will even make a deal with the devil,” says Azzawy. The U.S. response to the crisis was to send Maliki more surveillance drones and Hellfire missiles.

In Mosul, the largest Sunni-majority city in Iraq, Maliki’s operational commander was Mahdi al-Gharawi, a Shiite general who was infamous both for corruption and human rights abuses – which

Camp Speicher, a former American base, unarmed recruits and cadets walked off the base, believing they would be given safe passage to Shiite areas by local tribesmen. Instead, they walked straight into the arms of ISIS. At least 770 Shiite prisoners were executed at Speicher, and hundreds more in Mosul and other towns that ISIS captured. The group posted videos of truckloads of men being taken to mass graves and shot, part of a pageant of savagery that ISIS would gleefully exhibit as the months progressed: crucifixions, slavery, the beheading of foreign journalists.

Thoroughly post-modern, the ISIS propagandists understood that spectacle itself was reality, and that this reality could spread virally across the globe, summoning the clash of civilizations that they desperately sought. They spoke a language

“The hardcore ones, we kill,” says one Shiite militia leader. “What else can we do? Either they flee, or they’re killed in the fight.”

were bad enough that the American military had tried, unsuccessfully, to have him arrested – earning him the nickname “General Deftar,” after the 10,000-dinar note. As ISIS gathered strength in Mosul, Gharawi worked closely with Shiite death squads to target Sunnis. “Asaib and Badr fighters were coming from Baghdad wearing civilian clothes and working in darkness,” says Khalid, the police colonel, who was deployed in Mosul. “They get some names, go into their houses and kill them. In the end, all of Mosul hated us.”

In the early hours of June 6th last year, ISIS launched an attack on government positions in western Mosul. It’s likely that it was only intended to be a raid, but symbolic decision-making by the Iraqi leadership led to chaos and panic within the demoralized army and police ranks. Soon the entire city’s defenses had fled before a much smaller opponent.

The fall of Mosul triggered a catastrophic collapse of Iraqi forces across a wide swath of the country. In less than two months, tens of thousands of square miles and millions of citizens fell into the clutches of ISIS, who also captured tanks, artillery, and enormous quantities of ammunition and weapons that the U.S. had sent to Iraq. Four army divisions were almost entirely destroyed. In the scorching deserts of western Iraq, whole brigades melted away, deserting rather than face thirst and starvation, and leaving key Syrian border crossings unguarded. At the besieged

formed in the crucibles of the American occupation and the civil war, the language of Abu Ghraib and the death squads, of power drills as tools of torture, and incinerating airstrikes, of 200,000 dead Iraqis. But theirs was a brutality to overshadow it all. And they succeeded, rendering the West panicked and incoherent in its outrage. ISIS’s Shiite opponents, however, were not at a loss for words. The hard men in Baghdad understood the language of terror. As ISIS raced toward city, the broken Iraqi army fleeing before them, the militias were mobilizing to defend their capital.

MOHAMMAD – NOT HIS real name – has grown a paunch since his days of running rockets and ammunition for the Mahdi Army, the Shiite insurgent group that had battled U.S. forces in 2004. He survived the bloodiest years of the war, when bodies lay unclaimed for days in the streets, and when peace came, he did well turning his skills to the import business. When I sit with him, he’s in the process of moving into a new house to fit his burgeoning family. He was looking to enjoy the dividends of peacetime – but when the call came, he was ready.

After the fall of Mosul last summer, Baghdad was in a state of terror. People hoarded water and food. The streets were deserted. Foreigners and wealthy Iraqis packed flights out of the country.



"People were in shock," Mohammad says. "They were afraid Daesh would enter the city. The leaders in the government had screwed up everything."

Then, on June 13th, the country's highest Shiite religious authority, Ayatollah Ali Sistani, ruled in a *fatwa* that it was a religious obligation for every man to take up arms against ISIS – on behalf of the state, he was careful to say, not any sect. But in practice, it galvanized a takeover of Iraq's security forces by hard-line Shiite militias.

The Mahdi Army had lain dormant since 2008, when its leader, Muqtada al-Sadr, was pressured to make peace with the Iraqi government ahead of the American withdrawal. Sadr, who remains one of the most powerful political figures in Iraq, announced the creation of a new force, Saraya al-Salam, or the Peace Brigades. Mohammad, resuming his duties as an arms supplier, found that the prices he had to pay on the black market had risen dramatically. Everyone was arming themselves for the coming battle against ISIS. Even the widespread looting of Iraqi arms depots – often by deserting soldiers and officers themselves – couldn't satisfy demand.

"People were buying weapons and ammunition like crazy," he says. "The price went up sixfold. For example, something like a Kalashnikov that might have cost \$600 was now \$3,000. Katyusha rockets? Before one was \$200, now it costs \$1,200."

Sadr ordered a parade in Baghdad on June 21st. Mohammad, who says he

AFTER THE FALL

A boy in Baghdad inspects a car bombing in December. At least 17,000 Iraqi civilians were killed last year.

helped organize it, had only six days to prepare, but he was amazed at its size and the array of weaponry on display. Thousands of armed men marched through the streets accompanied by long-range, truck-mounted missiles and anti-aircraft guns. The message was clear: If the Iraqi state couldn't defend Baghdad, the militias would. "The guys were excited and happy to hold their weapons again," Mohammad says. "Even for me, it was a shock. I didn't expect us to have these kinds of weapons."

The same month, the prime minister announced a government program called al-Hashd al-Shabi, or the Popular Mobilization. Across the Shiite heartlands of the south, tens of thousands volunteered, almost all through the auspices of one of the religious militias. In one small town in the south, a group of middle-aged men showed me video clips of themselves wildly firing at ISIS positions with belt-fed machine guns, which they struggle to hold against their enormous potbellies.

But at the core of the mobilization were experienced and motivated militiamen, who saw their fight as a religious duty, and a continuation of the battle they had fought against Sunni opponents since the American invasion. They deployed in a defensive

arc around Baghdad and the holy cities of Samarra and Karbala and, over months of fighting, stopped ISIS's advance.

"Their resistance is very important – they're the last obstacle against the advance of ISIS toward Baghdad," says Dr. Hisham al-Hashemi, a security researcher based in Baghdad. "All of them are affiliated with some Shia religious party. For propaganda purposes, they have a few Sunnis and Christians, but, no, it's an entirely Shia phenomenon."

These militias enjoyed close links with Iran and often fought with Iranian advisers in the field. In photos that circulated widely online, Gen. Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the top branch of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, posed with militiamen and Iraqi officers. "The aftereffect of all this was an increase of Iranian influence," says Phillip Smyth, an adjunct fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "Iran has gained a significant foothold in Iraqi politics and on the battlefield. It's a huge threat to U.S. interests."

Perhaps the militia that best exemplifies the opportunistic rise of sectarianism is Asaib. Originally an Iranian-backed "special group" within the Mahdi Army – U.S. officials believe it was responsible for incidents like a 2007 commando raid that abducted and killed five American soldiers – it was patronized by Maliki, and is one of the most feared militias in Baghdad.

I decide to take up the offer of Sheikh Maher, the Asaib commander I met in the

bomb-squad office, to learn more about the group. Maher lives in Shahla, a poor Shiite neighborhood. A line of concrete blast barriers plastered with martyrs' posters surrounds a blue-domed mosque near his house, which sits on a muddy lane beside an empty butcher's stall. Welcoming us warmly, Maher has his bodyguard fetch us glasses of tart, homemade tamarind juice, and we sit cross-legged on the carpet.

Maher's career tells the story of the shifting tides of power in Iraq. Thirty-seven years old, he was once a conscript in Saddam's army who'd been jailed for desertion. After the American invasion, he decided to join the security forces. (He shows me a photo of himself clean-shaven, looking fit in blue-and-gray tiger-striped fatigues.) Then, with the rise of the Sadrists, he joined the Mahdi Army and began his religious education in 2008, which helped him assume a leadership role. In 2012, he joined Asaib. He shakes his head when I ask about the allegations of massacres carried out by Asaib that have been documented by Human Rights Watch and the press. "There is some propaganda against Asaib that they are brutal killers," he says. "It's not true."

In 2013, Maher had gone to fight against Sunni rebels in Syria, part of an Iranian-backed mobilization of Iraqi and Lebanese Shiite militias that had turned the war in President Bashar al-Assad's favor. It was a sign of a deeper realignment taking place in the Middle East. "We were fighting against Daesh in Syria before Sistani's *fatwa*," he says. "It's the same tactics: snipers and IEDs." Now Maher spends weeks with his unit holding the frontline west of Baghdad, which is shared between different militias.

Maher is adamant that it's the militias, not the Iraqi government, that are leading the fight. "When the army comes, they're working under our orders," he says. "We get our ammunition from the army. If we need tanks, we get the army to coordinate. We borrow heavy weapons from them also."

For Maher, the fight is an existential one against an enemy whose brutality justifies the harshest tactics. Aware of what would befall them if they were captured, his militia routinely executes prisoners. "The hardcore ones, we kill. What else can we do?" he says. Any Sunnis who remain in the area meet the same fate. "We treat them like Daesh. Either they leave their houses and flee, or they're killed in the fight."

A small Chihuahua appears in the doorway. Maher's blunt features light up. "Katyusha!" he says, and extends his hand, which is as large as the dog. "She just had

puppies," he tells me. He shows me a video of her playing with his pet monkey Tutti.

Thanks to the collapse of state security forces, Iraq's future belongs to militiamen like Sheikh Maher. He tells me that he's currently contemplating an offer to join the army as a colonel, as befitting his stature as a religious leader. "I want to help my coun-

welcomed by residents who sought protection from the Shiite death squads. As we drive in, the main streets look deserted apart from a few desultory shawarma stands and tire shops.

I'm traveling with Lina Ismail, a young woman who works for a local human rights NGO. She goes to these Sunni neighbor-



BATTLE LINES

Iraq's new prime minister, Haider al-Abadi (above, with Obama), has vowed to fight ISIS. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, ISIS's leader (left), forged the core of his army at a U.S. prison camp.

try," he says. "And I want to join under the cover of the law."

In addition to his three wives here, he has another one who lives in the U.K., but he isn't planning to emigrate anytime soon. "If I go to the U.K., they'll say that I'm Daesh," he jokes, indicating his frayed beard and shaved mustache. He laughs and shakes his head. "Iraq is a terrible country, but it's my home."

DOWN THE ROAD FROM Sheikh Maher, separated by a dried-up river, is Ghazaliya, a newer neighborhood that was built during the war with Iran in the 1980s. Many of the houses in the area were home to military officers, mostly Sunni Arabs who benefitted as a group from Saddam's patronage. Ghazaliya had been a wealthy area then, with coffee shops and clothing stores, but during the ethnic cleansing that swept Baghdad at the height of the U.S. occupation in the mid-2000s, it became a Sunni enclave controlled by Al Qaeda, who were sometimes

hoods to gather testimony and offer financial and medical support in the face of a wave of renewed persecution by the militias, which have made these areas dangerous to visit. Since the fall of Mosul, Ismail says, the number of kidnappings in the city has increased dramatically as militias like Asaib move through the streets, often using vehicles with official license plates. "The police are afraid of the militias," she says. "This Popular Mobilization has legitimized them. They've been doing horrible things in Ghazaliya." At night, convoys of militia fighters come from Shahla and other areas and roam the neighborhood, harassing and abducting the residents. "They're living in terror," says Ismail. "They don't know when the patrols are coming. They even arrest people in their homes."

Though the government has promised the militia fighters salaries, many haven't been paid for months, if at all. Some believe they've been using the ransom money from the kidnappings to finance operations. No one knows how many have fallen victim. Ismail says she sometimes hears of more than a dozen cases in Baghdad each week. One website that tracked press reports counted 421 bodies found in the capital between June and January. The government has forbidden journalists from visiting the morgue. "After the return of sectarian killings, they're trying to do a press blackout," says a doctor who works there. "They've expelled the old manager because he was a Sunni. The new one is a leader in Asaib. He brags about it. The killings began after Maliki entered Anbar and escalated after Mosul. The situation is very difficult. The militias have taken over Baghdad."

FROM TOP: STEPHEN CROWLEY/NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX; MILITANT VIDEO/AP IMAGES

Even worse, the doctor says, are the areas outside the city in the so-called Baghdad Belts, where both ISIS and the militias are active. He visits several times a week in order to volunteer in clinics there. The government is using indiscriminate artillery and airstrikes, he says, including barrel bombs: "The situation in the outskirts is miserable. It's chaos. There is no control by either side. Sometimes it's Daesh, sometimes it's the Popular Mobilization. It's like a seesaw. Those killed out there do not make it to the morgue. "The bodies are buried locally. If they suspect someone, they torture and kill them without any mercy."

In the living room of a modest home in Ghazaliya, Ismail and I meet with Medhat Dhari, an electrical engineer, and his wife and son. They came to the neighborhood to escape Shiite death squads during the sectarian war. "We were moving a lot then," Dhari said. "We transferred to this area. It was a little safer."

During that time, in Baghdad, both Sunnis and Shiites could be killed simply for being in the wrong neighborhood or having the wrong name on their identity card. Every family was touched by death. But for a few years, things were getting better. After losing 12 family members, the Dharis felt like survivors of some apocalyptic calamity. But then the militias began abducting Sunnis in Baghdad again, and this time there was no Al Qaeda to fight back. Dhari's 19-year-old nephew was abducted and killed the year before. When his parents recovered his body, he bore marks of horrific torture.

Last year, on the evening of September 17th, Dhari's eldest son, Mamdouh, failed to return from his job at a cafe in the neighborhood. Dhari, fearing the worst, spent the night driving around to the police stations, praying he would not find his son's body. His mother stayed home and kept calling her son's phone, which was off. In the morning, one of the kidnappers answered and said they belonged to a prominent Shiite militia.

"Your son has confessed to some crimes," he told her.

"But he's just a kid," she answered.

The kidnappers demanded \$50,000 in ransom – a typical amount – and briefly put Mamdouh on the phone to prove that he was alive. They gave the family until 8:00 that evening to pay, or else they would kill him.

Dhari went to an office of the national security ministry to seek help. They told him to get a police report first, which he spent the day trying to do. When he came back with it, the ministry told him to get a court order, and he realized they were deliberately wasting his time. Later on, he says, one of them would tell him, "We know who these guys are, but we can't do anything."

Meanwhile, the family was frantically trying to put together the money. "Hurry or you will lose him," the kidnappers texted. The most they were able to get was \$15,000, which the kidnappers agreed to. They gave Dhari an address; he drove there and could see someone watching him from behind a curtain. By then it was midnight. His phone rang. "OK, put it down and go," the voice said. "In 10 minutes, you'll take Mamdouh." Dhari left the cash and drove around, waiting for another call. It never came.

In the morning, the police rang and told him to come – they had found his son. He had been shot in the back of the head and thrown into an empty lot, his hands and legs bound with plastic ties.

AS IRAQ SLID INTO CHAOS last summer, Obama was reluctant to intervene militarily, fearing a return of American troops to the quagmire of a sectarian civil war. Even after the fall of Mosul, Obama reiterated his skepticism of direct engagement to reporters: "There's no military solution inside of Iraq, certainly not one that is led by the United States."

But since then, the U.S. military commitment in Iraq has steadily escalated. Following Mosul, Obama launched airstrikes against ISIS and agreed to send up to 715 more military personnel, in addition to the couple of hundred advisers and thousands of contractors who were already present in Iraq. After the beheading in August of journalist James Foley led to public outrage, the president announced the formation of an international coalition against ISIS and authorized the military to deploy up to 3,100 troops – which the U.S. claims will not engage in ground combat, though Canadian special forces already have. In December, Congress approved a bill to spend \$5 billion to fight ISIS, including \$1.2 billion in training and equipment for the Iraqi military. Now, Obama has requested that Congress authorize a new war against ISIS, one that would give the president the power to take action in any country where the militant group is present.

So far, the strategy has succeeded in halting ISIS's offensive. But with an estimated 100,000 fighters, Shiite militias now outnumber the Iraqi army and police, and have been responsible for virtually all significant advances on the ground against ISIS, in many cases accompanied by Iranian military advisers. The heavy Iranian presence has, in turn, led to some awkward situations for their American counterparts back at headquarters. "The Iranians and Americans are working in the same places," says Dr. Hishemi, who works as a consultant for the Iraqi government. "When one comes, the other leaves. It's like hide-and-seek."

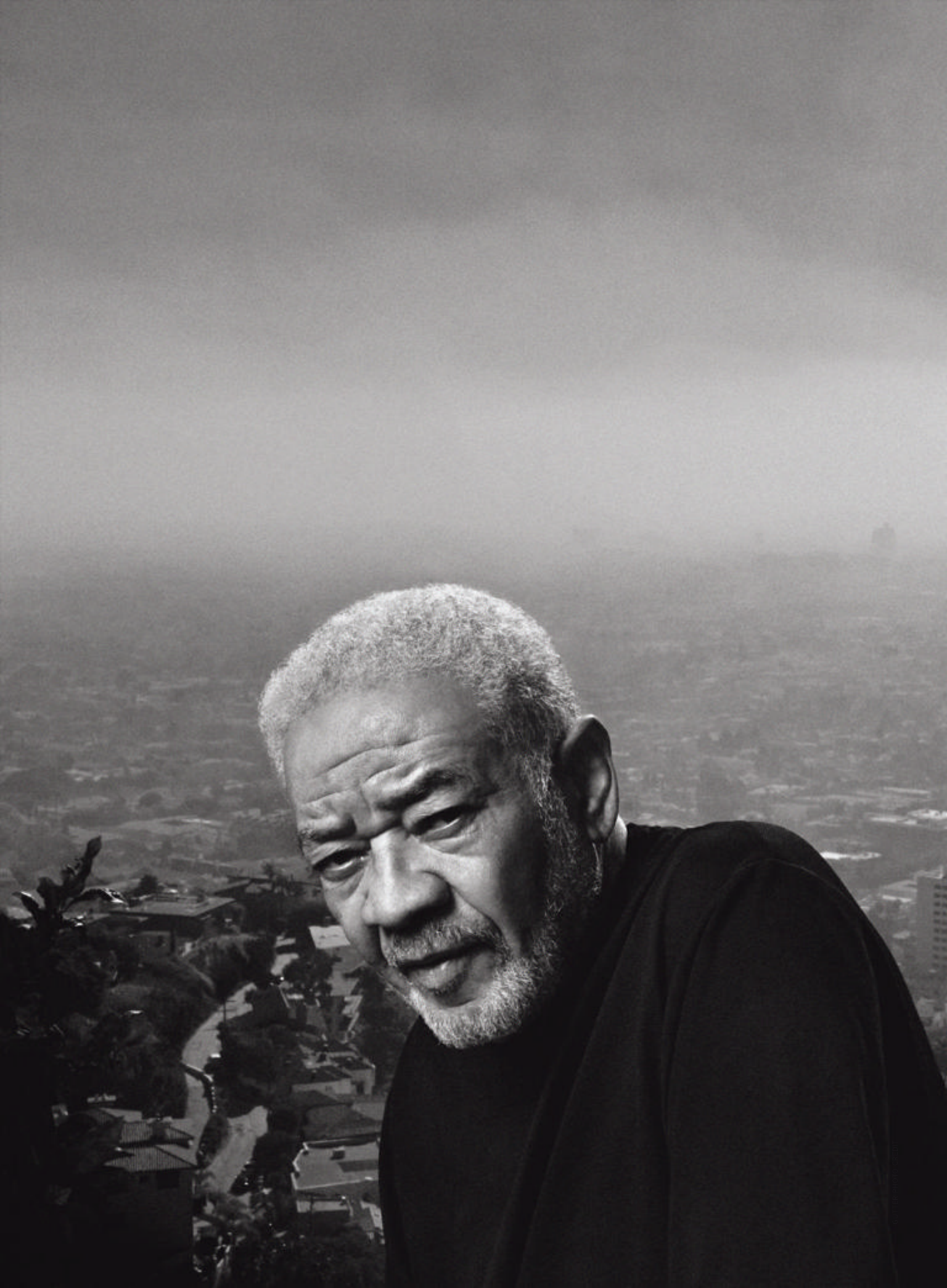
In August, Maliki was forced under U.S. pressure to abandon his third term as prime minister. His successor, Haider al-Abadi, is from the same Dawa party but has been praised by the Obama administration for his conciliatory gestures to Sunnis and Kurds. But Maliki and the old guard remain a potent political force. "You can have a new leader, but if you don't support him in changing the policies of his predecessor, that change will mean little," says Maria Fantappie, an analyst with the International Crisis Group. "Many people who were part of the previous government are still very powerful." (A representative for Prime Minister Abadi did not respond to requests for comment.)

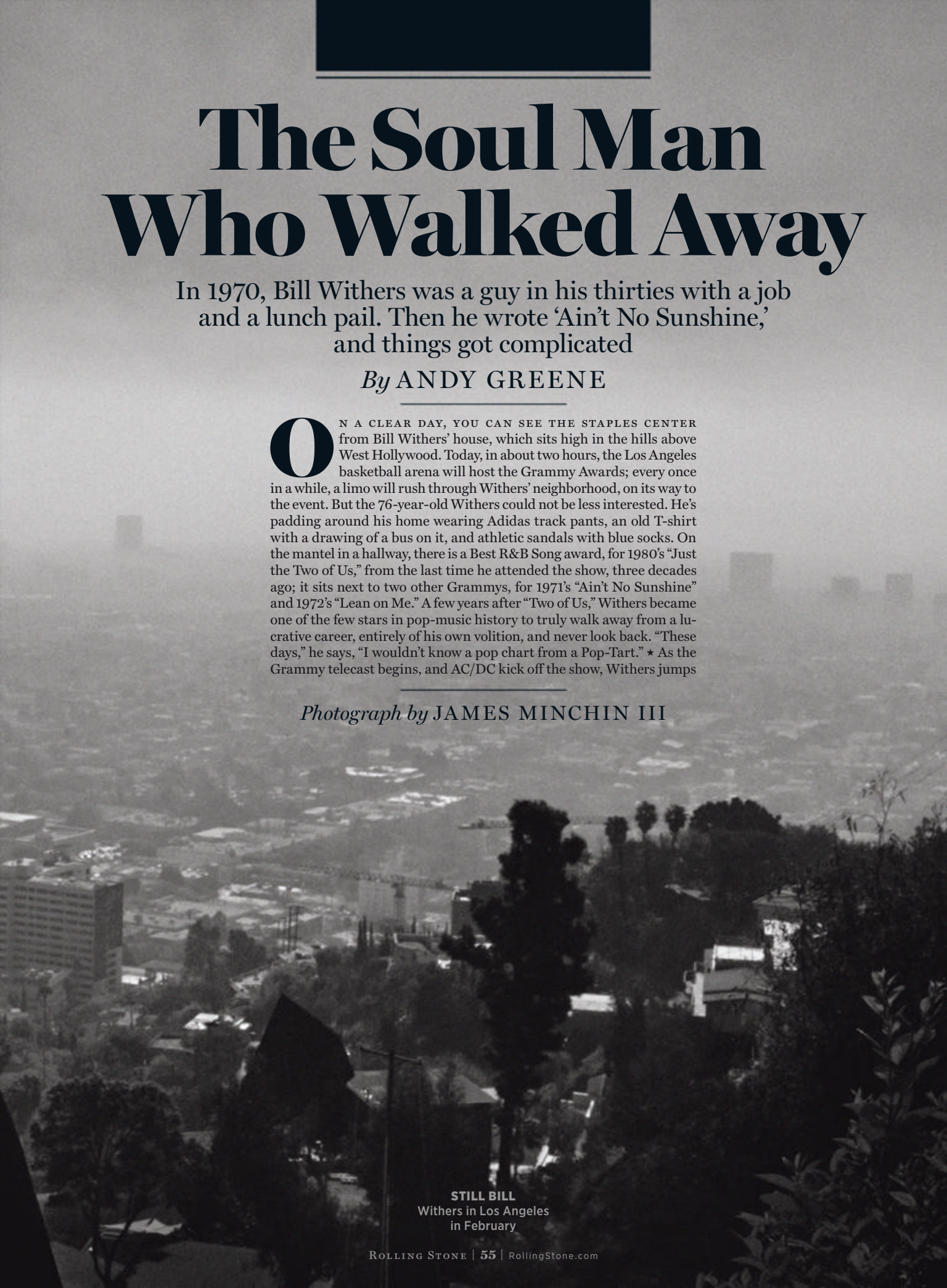
For now, the U.S. Marines and special forces deployed in the country remain concealed behind the high walls of the Green Zone, or else ensconced in several large military bases, where they're training Iraqi forces, including one near Ramadi that has been repeatedly attacked by ISIS. Central to Iraqi government and the U.S.'s strategy is the creation of a new National Guard, which will enlist local fighters, both from Sunni tribes and the militias. It remains to be seen whether it will provide an effective means for Sunni reintegration, or merely official cover for a militia takeover of the Iraqi forces.

The U.S. is now funneling more weapons into Iraq to replace those seized by ISIS last summer. Alarming, in its request to Congress, the Obama administration sought, and received, potential exemptions to laws that would require monitoring the use of transferred U.S. weapons. Militias like Kataib Hezbollah – closely linked to both Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah – have already photographed themselves with American-supplied arms and equipment, including Abrams tanks. "We are concerned by such photos and are looking further into the matter," says Psaki, the State Department spokeswoman. "Iraqi security forces should not lend or provide U.S.-origin equipment to militia forces without U.S. permission."

In its rush to stop ISIS, America has allied itself with forces far beyond its control. "The legality of the U.S. providing Iraq with arms and military aid is questionable at best," says Erin Evers, a researcher for Human Rights Watch. "It's disturbing to see Iranian-backed militias with American weapons. These militias aren't just fighting ISIS, they're also targeting civilians. It's radicalizing the population."

Today, Iraq has been, more or less, partitioned into three separate countries: the Kurdish-controlled North, the government-held Shiite South, and the Sunni territories that ISIS had dubbed the Islamic State. There was nothing inevitable about it, but in Iraq today, the international problems of geopolitics [Cont. on 66]





The Soul Man Who Walked Away

In 1970, Bill Withers was a guy in his thirties with a job and a lunch pail. Then he wrote 'Ain't No Sunshine,' and things got complicated

By ANDY GREENE

ON A CLEAR DAY, YOU CAN SEE THE STAPLES CENTER from Bill Withers' house, which sits high in the hills above West Hollywood. Today, in about two hours, the Los Angeles basketball arena will host the Grammy Awards; every once in a while, a limo will rush through Withers' neighborhood, on its way to the event. But the 76-year-old Withers could not be less interested. He's padding around his home wearing Adidas track pants, an old T-shirt with a drawing of a bus on it, and athletic sandals with blue socks. On the mantel in a hallway, there is a Best R&B Song award, for 1980's "Just the Two of Us," from the last time he attended the show, three decades ago; it sits next to two other Grammys, for 1971's "Ain't No Sunshine" and 1972's "Lean on Me." A few years after "Two of Us," Withers became one of the few stars in pop-music history to truly walk away from a lucrative career, entirely of his own volition, and never look back. "These days," he says, "I wouldn't know a pop chart from a Pop-Tart." ★ As the Grammy telecast begins, and AC/DC kick off the show, Withers jumps

Photograph by JAMES MINCHIN III

STILL BILL
Withers in Los Angeles
in February

into his Lexus SUV and heads down to his favorite restaurant, Le Petit Four; he has a hankering for liver and onions but settles for the blackened catfish. The hostess knows him by name, but otherwise he blends into the crowd. "I grew up in the age of Barbra Streisand, Aretha Franklin, Nancy Wilson," he says, still musing on the Grammys. "It was a time where a fat, ugly broad that could sing had value. Now everything is about image. It's not poetry. This just isn't my time."

Withers has been out of the spotlight for so many years that some people think he passed away. "Sometimes I wake up and I wonder myself," he says with a hearty chuckle. "A very famous minister actually called me to find out whether I was dead or not. I said to him, 'Let me check.'"

Others don't believe he is who he says: "One Sunday morning I was at Roscoe's Chicken and Waffles. These church ladies were sitting in the booth next to mine. They were talking about this Bill Withers song they sang in church that morning. I got up on my elbow, leaned into their booth and said, 'Ladies, it's odd you should mention that because I'm Bill Withers.' This lady said, 'You ain't no Bill Withers. You're too light-skinned to be Bill Withers!'"

His career lasted eight years by his own count; in that time, he wrote and recorded some of the most loved, most covered songs of all time, particularly "Lean on Me" and "Ain't No Sunshine" – tunes that feature dead-simple, soulful instrumentation and pure melodies that haven't aged a second. "He's the last African-American Everyman," says Questlove. "Jordan's vertical jump has to be higher than everyone. Michael Jackson has to defy gravity. On the other side of the coin, we're often viewed as primitive animals. We rarely land in the middle. Bill Withers is the closest thing black people have to a Bruce Springsteen."

Withers was stunned when he learned he had been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame this year. "I see it as an award of attrition," he says. "What few songs I wrote during my brief career, there ain't a genre that somebody didn't record them in. I'm not a virtuoso, but I was able to write songs that people could identify with. I don't think I've done bad for a guy from Slab Fork, West Virginia."

WITHERS' HOMETOWN IS IN A POOR rural area in one of the poorest states in the Union. His father, who worked in the coal mines, died when Bill was 13. "We lived right on the border of the black and white neighborhood," he says. "I heard guys playing country music, and in church I heard gospel. There was music everywhere."

The youngest of six children, Withers was born with a stutter and had a hard

time fitting in. "When you stutter, people have a tendency to disregard you," he says. That was compounded by the unvarnished Jim Crow racism that was a way of life in his youth. "One of the first things I learned, when I was around four, was that if you make a mistake and go into a white women's bathroom, they're going to kill your father." He was a teenager when Emmett Till, a 14-year-old from Chicago who allegedly whistled at a white woman while visiting relatives in Mississippi, was beaten to death by two men who were cleared of all charges by an all-white jury. "[Till] was right around my age," says Withers. "I thought, 'Didn't he know better?'"

Desperate to get out of Slab Fork, he enlisted in the Navy right after graduating from high school in 1956. Harry Truman had de-

Withers came out of nowhere: "Imagine 40,000 fans at a football game; 10,000 probably think they can quarterback, but maybe three can. I was one of those three."

segregated the armed forces eight years earlier, but Withers quickly discovered that didn't mean much at his first naval base, in Pensacola, Florida. "My first goal was, I didn't want to be a cook or a steward," he says. "So I went to aircraft-mechanic school. I still had to prove to people that thought I was genetically inferior that I wasn't too stupid to drain the oil out of an airplane."

By the time he was transferred to California in the mid-1960s, he realized he'd never have the courage to quit the Navy if he couldn't rid himself of his stutter. "I couldn't get out a word," he says. "I realized it wasn't physical. I figured out that my stutter – and this isn't the case for everyone – was caused by fear of the perception of the listener. I had a much higher opinion of everyone else than I did of myself. I started doing things like imagining everybody naked – all kinds of tricks I used on myself."

Against all conventional wisdom, it worked (though he still trips over the occasional word), and in 1965 he quit the Navy and became "the first black milkman in

Santa Clara County, California." He eventually took a job at an aircraft parts factory. As a Navy aircraft mechanic, he was ridiculously overqualified, but "it was all about survival."

One night around that time, he visited a club in Oakland where Lou Rawls was playing. "He was late, and the manager was pacing back and forth," says Withers. "I remember him saying, 'I'm paying this guy \$2,000 a week and he can't show up on time. I was making \$3 an hour, looking for friendly women, but nobody found me interesting. Then Rawls walked in, and all these women are talking to him.'"

Withers was in his late twenties. His music-business experience consisted of



sitting in a couple of times with a bar band while stationed in Guam in the Navy. He'd never played the guitar, but he headed to a pawn shop, bought a cheap one and began teaching himself to play. Between shifts at the factory, he began writing his own tunes. "I figured out that you didn't need to be a virtuoso to accompany yourself," he says.

He began saving from each paycheck until he had enough to record a crude demo. Withers shopped it around to major labels, which weren't interested, but then he got a meeting with Clarence Avant, a black music executive who had recently founded the indie label Sussex and had just signed the songwriter Rodriguez (of *Searching for Sugar Man* fame). "[Withers'] songs were unbelievable," Avant remembers. "You just had to listen to his lyrics. I gave him a deal and set him up with Booker T. Jones to produce his album."

Jones, the famous Stax keyboardist, went through his Rolodex and hired the

Associate editor ANDY GREENE wrote about Stephen King in November.

cream of the Los Angeles scene: drummer Jim Keltner, MGs bassist Donald "Duck" Dunn, Stephen Stills on guitar. "Bill came right from the factory and showed up in his old brogans and his old clunk of a car with a notebook full of songs," says Jones. "When he saw everyone in the studio, he asked to speak to me privately and said, 'Booker, who is going to sing these songs?' I said, 'You are, Bill.' He was expecting some other vocalist to show up."

Withers was extremely uneasy until Graham Nash walked into the studio. "He sat down in front of me and said, 'You don't know how good you are,'" Withers says. "I'll never forget it." They laid down the basic tracks for what became 1971's *Just As I Am* in a few days. (One of the songs was inspired by the 1962 Jack Lemmon-Lee Remick movie *Days of Wine and Roses*;

He took some earnings, bought a piano and, again, with no training, began fiddling around. One of the first things he came up with was a simple chord progression: "I didn't change fingers. I just went one, two, three, four, up and down the piano. It was the first thing I learned to play. Even a tiny child can play that."

Tired of love songs, he wrote a simple ode to friendship called "Lean on Me." Withers didn't think much of it. "But the guys at the record company thought it was a single," he says. It became the centerpiece of his second album, 1972's *Still Bill*. The song rocketed to Number One and was inescapable for the entire year.

Withers was now a hot commodity, appearing on *Soul Train* and the BBC, and headlining a show at Carnegie Hall that was released as a live album. But he re-

"It was like a diary," says Questlove. "That album was a pre-reality-show look at his life. Keep in mind this was years before Marvin Gaye did it with *Here, My Dear*."

Withers was also unhappy on the road. Despite having enormous radio hits, he found himself opening up for incongruous acts like Jethro Tull and making less money than he felt he deserved. Things got worse when Sussex went bankrupt in 1975, and Withers signed a five-record deal with Columbia. "I met my A&R guy, and the first thing he said to me was, 'I don't like your music or any black music, period,'" says Withers. "I am proud of myself because I did not hit him. I met another executive who was looking at a photo of the Four Tops in a magazine. He actually said to me, 'Look at these ugly niggers.'"

At Sussex, he had complete creative control over his music, but at Columbia he found himself in the middle of a large corporation that was second-guessing his moves. As he relives this part of his past, he gets teary. "There were no black executives," he says. "They'd say shit to me like, 'Why are there no horns on the song?' 'Why is this intro so long?' ... This one guy at Columbia, Mickey Eichner, was a huge pain in the ass," he adds. "He told me to cover Elvis Presley's 'In the Ghetto.' I'm a songwriter! That would be like buying a bartender a drink."

Eichner, who was the head of Columbia's A&R department, says he's "hurt" by Withers' words, and he has a different recollection of events. "He submitted a record, and we didn't hear a single," he says. "I suggested he maybe do an Elvis cover. He's very stubborn. I believe that a manager would have understood what I was trying to do, but he didn't have one, so there was nobody I could reason with." As far as racism at Columbia, Eichner says he doesn't recall "hearing or seeing anything."

With the exception of 1977's *Menagerie* (which contains the funky classic "Lovely Day"), none of the Columbia albums reached the Top 40. Withers' 1980 hit "Just the Two of Us" was a duet with Grover Washington Jr. on Elektra - "That was a 'kiss my ass' song to Columbia," says Withers. The low point came during the sessions for his last album, 1985's *Watching You Watching Me*. "They made me record that album at some guy's home studio," he says. "This stark-naked five-year-old girl was running around the house, and they said to her, 'We're busy. Go play with Bill.' Now, I'm this big black guy and they're sending a little naked white girl over to play with me! I said, 'I gotta get out of here. I can't take this shit!'"

WITHERS HASN'T RELEASED A NOTE OF music since then, aside from a guest spot on a 2004 Jimmy Buffett song; he has not performed publicly in concert in nearly 25 years. Right now he's sit- [Cont. on 66]



LOVELY DAY
Far left: Navy aircraft mechanic Withers, circa 1961: "It was all about survival." This page: Withers in London, 1973.

Withers was watching it on TV, and the doomed relationship at the film's center brought to mind a phrase: "Ain't no sunshine when she's gone.")

The album's cover photo was taken during Withers' lunch break at the factory; you can see him holding his lunch pail. "My co-workers were making fun of me," he says. "They thought it was a joke." Still unconvinced that music would pay off, he held on to his day job until he was laid off in the months before the album's release. Then, one day, "two letters came in the mail. One was asking me to come back to my job. The other was inviting me on to Johnny Carson." The *Tonight Show* appearance, in November 1971, helped propel "Ain't No Sunshine" into the Top 10, and the follow-up, "Grandma's Hands," reached Number 42.

By then, Withers was 32; he still marvels at the fact that he was able to come out of nowhere at that relatively advanced age. "Imagine 40,000 people at a stadium watching a football game," he says. "About 10,000 of them think they can play quarterback. Three of them probably could. I guess I was one of those three."

He refused to hire a manager, insisting on overseeing every aspect of his career, from producing his own songs to writing the liner notes to designing his album covers. "He was so opinionated," says Avant. "I was the closest thing he had to a manager. Everybody was scared of him."

"Early on, I had a manager for a couple of months, and it felt like getting a gasoline enema," says Withers. "Nobody had my interest at heart. I felt like a pawn. I like being my own man."

In 1973, Withers married Denise Nicholas, a star of the TV show *Room 222*. It was a rocky relationship from the start. "Their wedding day was the weirdest thing I've ever seen," Avant says. "I remember her semi-crying. She said, 'He doesn't love me.' I said, 'Bill, what are you doing getting married?' He said, 'I want everyone back home to know I'm marrying one of these Hollywood actresses.'" Withers and Nicholas had terrible fights, which soon began getting coverage in magazines like *Jet*; the couple split after little more than a year. Withers poured all of his pain from the breakup into his 1974 LP *Justments*.



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Reviews

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Dark Humor From Down Under



Courtney Barnett's first LP is full of sharp wit, quarter-life angst and crunchy Nineties riffs



Courtney Barnett

Sometimes I Sit and Think, and Sometimes I Just Sit

Mom + Pop

★★★★½

BY JON DOLAN

Courtney Barnett is only on her first proper album, but she's already setting herself apart as one of the sharpest, most original songwriters around – at any level, in any genre. The Australian singer-guitarist, 27, is a self-strafing humorist à la Lena Dunham who's also a Dylan-style word ninja, spooling out honest, funny, indelible stories wrung from the everyday stuff even a good novelist might overlook. Her loose, conversational lyrics are full of images you can't shake and characters you need to know more about. You don't just quote a Courtney Barnett song, you recap it.

Barnett started getting attention with her 2013 release *The Double EP: A Sea of Split Peas*, with ambling melodies and lyrics like "I masturbated to the songs you wrote.../It felt wrong, but it didn't take too long." Her writing has matured scarily fast on *Sometimes I Sit and Think, and Sometimes I Just Sit*, whose title perfectly sums up her biggest talent: No one is better than Barnett at crafting unforgettable songs from seemingly mundane subject matter. Write something about staring at the ceiling? She nails it with a richly detailed study in longing called "An Illustration of Loneliness

(Sleepless in NY).” OK, how about watching grass grow? No problemo: “Small Poppies” builds a seven-minute slacker-blues odyssey around the question of whether to mow the lawn. On “Dead Fox,” a comedic bit about trying to eat healthy on a budget (“Jen insists that we buy organic vegetables/And I must admit that I was a little skeptical at first/A little pesticide can’t hurt”) spins off into a hilarious monologue about a minor freakout while driving.

The most surprising thing about *Sometimes I Sit* might be how much it moves. The tunes are tight and sticky; the guitars hit with real sizzle and bite, accented by flourishes like the garage-rock organ in “Debbie Downer” or the cowbell swing of “Aqua Profunda!” The catchy, crunchy “Pedestrian at Best” is her old-school indie hit – in 1995, MTV’s *120 Minutes* would have played it between Elastica and Spacehog – complete with so-totally-Nineties anti-corporate lyrics: “Give me all your money/And I’ll make some origami, honey.”

Barnett puts her own apathy and insecurities front and center. But she writes empathetically about other people, too, like the guy in “Elevator Operator,” who gets confused for a suicide case when he skips work to daydream on a roof. Some of the album’s most striking moments are the most reflective ones, particularly the heart-ripping “Depreston,” a pretty folk-pop mumbler. Barnett sings about driving out to the suburbs to look at a house in her price range; the place seems great, but darker details start to crowd her mind. The woman who used to live there has died, and there’s a photo of a young man (her husband? her son?) in Vietnam. Barnett realizes she’d have to level the house and start over, respecting these strangers’ past by destroying it – which she doesn’t have the money to do. Oh, well, back to renting. But wherever Barnett ends up, we’re going to want to go with her. She’s a talent we’ll be following for decades.

LISTEN NOW!
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RollingStone.com/albums.

2 many
DJs: Diplo
(left) and
Skrillex



24-Hour Party People: Diplo and Skrillex

The EDM superstars team up for a frenetic, futuristic, relentlessly fun collaborative album

Jack Ü Skrillex and Diplo Present Jack Ü

Owsla/Mad Decent ★★½



Skrillex and Diplo’s first album together has one purpose: moving bodies. But that simple quest has led the duo to a wonderfully trim set that’s as forward-sounding as any dance release in recent memory. Though they begin most of its 10 tracks in familiar territory, they quickly push on to new ground, or at least new levels of intensity. Early highlight “Beats Knockin’” adds industrial distortion and whiplash-inducing tempo changes to a frenzied New Orleans bounce reminiscent of Diplo’s “Express Yourself,” and “Jungle Bae” (featuring Trinidadian star Bunji Garlin) brings additional firepower to the Carnival-ready soca-EDM hybrid of Diplo’s Major Lazer project.

In dubstep’s peak days, Skrillex blasted through songs like these with overpowering explosions of computer-generated noise. Here, he and Diplo flip the script: On “Jungle Bae,” “Febreze” (which features 2 Chainz) and the single “Take Ü There,” sparse bass drops act as black holes, using negative space to change the gravitational pull of an entire track. Justin Bieber holds his own on the ballad “Where Are Ü Now,” but lesser guests are occasionally lost amid the restless drums and ricocheting synths. For listeners, though, getting lost in these tracks is half the fun.

KEY TRACKS:
“Jungle Bae,”
“Take Ü There”

NICK MURRAY



Mark Knopfler

Tracker Verve

★★★★½

Eighties guitar hero looks back with a quietly great solo album

With bands like the War on Drugs refracting Dire Straits’ honeyed 1980s guitar sound, it’s surprising that Mark Knopfler hasn’t rebooted his old band lately. Instead, he’s been unpacking his influences on modest, multifaceted rock LPs like this one. Opening on a vamp recalling Dave Brubeck’s “Take Five,” then veering into Celtic folk, “Laughs and Jokes and Drinks and Smokes” sets the tone for this burnished set about days past. “Basil” nods to Knopfler’s youth in Northumbria; “Skydiver” echoes Seventies Grateful Dead. Knopfler’s quicksilver guitar is understated, and he delivers stories of stoic ache like an old watchmaker on a pub stool – quietly riveting.

WILL HERMES



Luke Bryan

Spring Break... Checkin' Out

Capitol Nashville

★★★★

Fun-loving country dude takes one last swing through the party

Luke Bryan is one of Nashville’s top stars, but he can’t stop himself from skipping town for just one more *Spring Break*. His seventh and final entry in the seasonal series pairs five new tracks with a few first released in 2014. The 38-year-old makes it all seem romantic, even when he’s winking at his own advancing age: “This ain’t the first time we’ve partied under these stars.” There’s a little heartbreak here and there, but drinking – a constant theme, naturally – helps wash it away. Everything goes smoothly until “Spring Breakdown,” a Solo-cup toast in which Bryan suddenly realizes both the tragedy of youth and the worst part about vacations: that they both eventually end.

NICK MURRAY



ON NEWSSTANDS NOW

Also available at bn.com/rshiphop.



Awolnation

Run Red Bull

★★★½

Electro-rock crew overdoses on big ambitions on Album Two

L.A.'s Awolnation broke out with their 2011 hit "Sail," a dark and stormy electro-rock power ballad on which singer Aaron Bruno succeeded in sliding the phrase "blame it on my ADD" into the pop consciousness. His ADD is still cooking on the band's latest album: Bruno is a studio impressionist whose songs flip from Cali-pop whimsy to lumpy dance rock to shout-y arena bombast as he drops chest-thumping lines like "I stand alone and curse at the sky." At their best, songs like "Dreamers" and "Hollow Moon (Bad Wolf)" hint at something approaching the Queen of EDM – a terrifyingly ambitious idea that even someone more talented than Bruno would have a tough time pulling off. **JON DOLAN**



Heems

Eat Pray Thug

Greedhead/Megaforce ★★★½

Ex-Das Racist MC makes an honest, emotional solo record

In his first album since the breakup of meta-rap trio Das Racist, the group's Himanshu Suri has stopped hiding "behind the humor and absurdity." That doesn't mean he doesn't still have great punchlines ("They borrow/Not from my borough/I'm 'thorough' like Henry David"). Heems' attempt at an "honest" record basically means doubling down on the hallmarks of traditional New York underground rap: hard beats, knotty rhymes and a political streak. It's the least think-piece-ready album he's ever been on – but with tons of incisive emotional insights on growing up of South Asian descent in post-9/11 America, it's the most likely to kick-start a long career.

CHRISTOPHER R. WEINGARTEN

REISSUES



The Pretty Things circa 1967

Loud, Free and Wildly Ahead of Their Time

The Pretty Things *Bouquets From a Cloudy Sky*

Snapper ★★★



Founded in London in 1963 by singer Phil May and an original Rolling Stone, guitarist Dick Taylor, the Pretty Things took their name from a 1955 Bo Diddley single and covered four of his tunes on their debut LP. The Pretties also supercharged Diddley's iconic shuffle and tremolo strum into an avenging-R&B mayhem – caught right away on the 1964 45s "Rosalyn" and "Don't Bring Me Down" – that was the delinquent model for garage rock, punk and glam (David Bowie covered both songs on 1973's *Pin Ups*). That would have been legacy enough for most bands. But the Pretties were impatient modernists, carrying that blues zeal to psychedelia (1967's "Defecting Grey"), rock opera (ahead of the Who, on 1968's *S.F. Sorrow*) and progressive rock (1970's *Parachute*) with spectacular if commercially dire results. This grand box takes that tale, across 11 studio albums and a feast of extras, up to the present day: a 2012 throttling of the Beatles' "Helter Skelter." Taylor's old band may cast the longer shadow, but this one is determined to have the last word. **DAVID FRICKE**

A Lost San Francisco Gem

Ron Nagle *Bad Rice* Omnivore ★★★



Singer-songwriter Ron Nagle was proudly out of step in acid-rock San Francisco: leading the Who-ish pop-art band the Mystery Trend, then issuing this sweet-and-salty 1970 meal of prescient roots rock and slippery romanticism. This two-CD reissue has demos that show how Nagle got to his lost-classic blend of proto-Rockpile brawls ("Marijuana Hell," "Sister Cora") and, in "Frank's Store," balladry laden with Randy Newman's strings and written from Tom Waits' future bar stool. **D.F.**

Out of Bob Marley's Shadow

Yabby You *Dread Prophecy* Shanachie ★★★



As Bob Marley took reggae to the world in the Seventies, singer-producer Vivian Jackson, a.k.a. Yabby You, was filling the wake in Jamaica with righteous and sensual singles – the sublime debut, "Conquering Lion," the poised confrontations "Jah Vengeance" and "Run Come Rally" – that fused dread sermons and R&B-vocal class. On this three-CD set, Jackson (who died in 2010) emerges from Marley's shadow as earthy and astute in the studio, on his own and drawing heavy roots from singers like Willi Williams and the toaster Big Youth. **D.F.**



Colleen Green

I Want to Grow Up Hardly Art

★★★

L.A. songwriter summons the fuzzed-out spirit of the Nineties

After making her name with a string of home-recorded releases – boasting excellent titles like *Milo Goes to Compton* – Los Angeles songwriter Colleen Green takes her wispy, lovelorn vignettes into a real studio on *I Want to Grow Up*. She kisses off her twenties with fuzz-pop guitars and breathy sighs in the Nineties mode of Juliana Hatfield or the Muffs. The boy she yearns for is a "Wild One," but when she grabs hold of him, she finds she can't "Pay Attention." So she'd rather spend her nights with "TV." Her best shot is the punked-up "Grind My Teeth" – it turns out the only one of these boys worth her time is the one who stresses her out all night. **ROB SHEFFIELD**



Will Butler

Policy Merge

★★★

Arcade Fire's little brother has fun, makes delightful noise

The first solo album by the younger Butler sibling in Arcade Fire is less than half the length of his band's 2013 *Reflektor*. *Policy* is also more playful, a montage of impulses – crunchy rock, apocalyptic electro-disco, solo-John Lennon balladry – that come like whiplash. There are strains of Butler's day job in his voice (more bright and boyish than his brother Win's) and in the melodic arc of "Son of God," a slice of *The Suburbs* skinned down to the folk-rock jitters of the Violent Femmes. But the running theme here is a giddy release – the Buzzcocks-style guitars and dark jokes about commitment in "What I Want," the helium-gospel rush of "Witness" – packed with care. **DAVID FRICKE**



Seth Avett and Jessica Lea Mayfield

Seth Avett & Jessica Lea Mayfield Sing Elliott Smith

Ramseur ★★

A heartfelt, intermittently great tribute to the late songwriter

Elliott Smith's all-too-brief career inspired a generation of artists taken by his piercing lyrics and delicate melodies. On this loving, hit-or-miss tribute, Seth Avett and Jessica Lea Mayfield draw largely from Smith's 1997 breakthrough, *Either/Or*, and his posthumous work. Mayfield provides the highlights with her grunge rendition of "Roman Candle" and her elegant take on "Twilight." But the real revelation is how well such deeply personal material lends itself to interpretation. You're left marveling less at these adequate covers and more at Smith's foolproof songbook.

JONATHAN BERNSTEIN



The Minus 5

Dungeon Golds Yep Roc

★★★★½

Northwestern indie all-stars won't go down without a fight

"Not ready to die, die, die/ Not ready to fold," Scott McCaughey, the guitarist and ring-leader of this Pacific Northwest collective, sings in "My Generation," a dirty-glam original that turns the title of the Who's 1965 single into a fighting-senior moment. The 12 songs here first appeared in a limited-edition 2014 five-LP box. This culling from that set, featuring Minus 5 regulars including Peter Buck and Jeff Tweedy, is a welcome sharing of the band's playful way with Sixties pastiche ("It's Magenta, Man!") and vigorous defense of pop classicism's truths and joys. "Hold down the fort while I'm away," McCaughey says in the Byrds-y nugget "Hold Down the Fort," although he doesn't sound close to leaving.

DAVID FRICKE



Strange days: Brock

Eight Years of Ideas, Stuffed Into One Album

Modest Mouse's comeback LP is an ambitious, unsettled opus that's well worth digging into

Modest Mouse *Strangers to Ourselves* Epic ★★★★★½



Welcome to alternative rock's *Chinese Democracy*. Modest Mouse's sixth studio album is the Washington state band's first full-length work of new songs since 2007; it may also be the longest hour of music you hear this year. Singer-songwriter Isaac Brock and drummer Jeremiah Green, aided by a cast of dozens, including the Shins' James Mercer, have stuffed *Strangers to Ourselves* to infinity with textural detail and manic leaps in style: the chamber-folk title song, the rococo hip-hop of "Lampshades on Fire," the '79-Talking Heads sprint "The Ground Walks, With Time in a Box." The effect is a riot of craft that never coheres but rewards committed listening, thrilling in bolts and spurts like a good multiband compilation.

There is a lurking sense in Brock's choppy ocean of lyrics – as if he's thrown the words together from a library of agitated tweets – and chantlike singing. His world has been physically and socially devastated by greed, carelessness and the death of simple courtesies. "Ain't it hard feeling tired all the time?" Brock asks in "The Best Room." He also sings this at the start of the song – "Let loose with your charms, go reckless unharmed" – like a guy for whom there is no such thing as overkill, only failing to see how far you can go.

KEY TRACK:
"Lampshades on Fire"

DAVID FRICKE



Various Artists

Original Soundtrack From Season 1 of 'Empire'

Columbia ★★

The hit music-biz soap gets a lukewarm companion album

Where's Cookie when you need her? This soundtrack for the hottest show on TV could use more of the beat-you-with-a-broomstick fire of Taraji P. Henson's character. Instead, stars Jussie Smollett (Jamal) and Bryshere "Yazz" Gray (Ha-keem) headline a spotty set of original tracks with production by music supervisor Timbaland and his protégé Jim Beanz. They give Smollett his own "Cry Me a River" in "Good Enough." But underwhelming rapper Yazz gets the overblown "Power of the Empire." Jennifer Hudson and Mary J. Blige make cameos, while Courtney Love – all bluesy hurt on "Walk Out on Me" – brings a little rock-star cred to the party. **CHUCK ARNOLD**



Tobias Jesso Jr.

Goon True Panther

★★★★½

Adele's new favorite piano man is a heartbroken charmer

Paul McCartney, Harry Nilsson, Randy Newman – comparisons are inescapable for this 29-year-old singer-songwriter. But accusing Tobias Jesso Jr. of piano-rock plagiarism is like accusing Shake Shack of hamburger mimicry. His debut LP gathers 12 beautifully lean ballads sung in a vulnerable tenor, with vintage studio touches blended by sharp producers including JR White, Patrick Carney and Ariel Rechtshaid. If there's a theme, it's SoCal heartbreak. The narrator of "Hollywood" tries, fries, hears some lies and nearly dies in that snake-pit town; "Leaving LA" is an indelible lost-love lament. But cheer up, dude – with fans like Adele tweeting your music, you can move anywhere you like.

WILL HERMES

Something for Almost Everyone

From police robots to scream queens, Hollywood is still a game of hit-and-miss

By Peter Travers

Chappie

Hugh Jackman, Dev Patel

Directed by Neill Blomkamp

★½

SOUTH AFRICAN FILMMAKER Neill Blomkamp played the robot card hard and brilliantly in his 2009 debut film, *District 9*. He did it to lesser effect in 2013's *Elysium*. Now, in *Chappie*, Blomkamp – again drawing on the apartheid and xenophobia of his heritage – creates a futuristic world that goes haywire when man creates a robot in his image. Sadly, Blomkamp's ideas feel depleted this time, dulled by repetition and other cinematic droids that stretch from HAL 9000 in 2001: *A Space Odyssey* to Ultron in the upcoming sequel to *The Avengers*.

Chappie feels played out from the start when a scientist (Dev Patel) reboots a police droid so it can think and feel for itself. Kidnapped by thugs, the droid – renamed Chappie (Sharlto Copley does the excellent motion-capture) – is programmed to shoot, steal cars and talk street, muthafucka. Enemies of artificial intelligence, repped by a weapons designer (Hugh Jackman) and a profiteer (Sigourney Weaver), see potential for evil, and they want it destroyed. His creator sees only Chappie's humanity. What do you think? Blomkamp and his wife and co-writer, Terri Tatchell, stack the deck. Instead of awe, we get *E.T.-aww*.

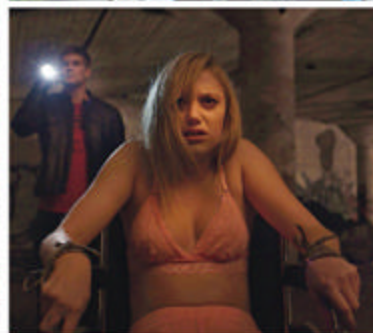
It Follows

Maika Monroe

Directed by David Robert Mitchell

★★★★

NAME A GOOD RECENT HORROR movie. After *The Babadook*, you're stuck, right? *It Follows* ends the drought. Writer-di-



THE HORROR! THE HORROR! A robocop wreaks havoc in *Chappie* (above). Left: Damsel Monroe distressed in *It Follows*.

rector David Robert Mitchell (*The Myth of the American Sleepover*) has clearly studied up on John Carpenter, especially *Halloween*. But Mitchell has his own twisted gift for letting atmosphere help define character. *It Follows* creeps you out big-time in that cool way that freezes the blood.

On a tree-lined street in a Michigan suburb, a girl runs for her life – in heels, yet. We don't see what's chasing her, but she ends up dead. All we learn is that the *It* that follows doesn't die when you're dead. It goes after the next victim, like a perniciously lethal STD.

Mitchell's focus is on Jay (a terrific Maika Monroe), a teen whose back-seat sex with Hugh (Jake Weary) makes her *It*. He's passed *It* along. It can take on different shapes – a naked old man on a roof, an erotically ravenous parent – that only the infected can see. That means Jay's friends must take her at her word. With the help of haunting wide-screen imag-

es from cinematographer Michael Gioulakis, the tension escalates so high we're not sure what we're seeing. The uncertainty breaks the film's spell near the end. Till then, *It Follows* shakes you up good.

Cinderella

Lily James, Cate Blanchett

Directed by Kenneth Branagh

★★★★

IT'S GORGEOUS. YOU SHOULD know that before you reject another Disney take on Ella of the cinders. And it's not a musical. Can't you just hear a chorus of boys sigh with relief? *Cinderella* is the first of the new Mouse House attempts to turn its animated classics into live-action crowd-pleasers (next up is *Beauty and the Beast*, with Emma Watson as Belle). Count *Cinderella* as a dazzling dream of a movie from director Kenneth Branagh, who can leap from the Bard (*Henry V*) to the boffo (*Thor*) with no apparent sweat.

The radiant Lily James (Lady Rose on *Downton Abbey*) brings a glint of frisky feminism to the mistreated Ella. Even her first meeting, on horseback, with the prince (Richard Madden of *Game of Thrones*), who pretends he's

a lowly palace intern, shows she has ideas on how to run a kingdom. It's a shame that the script, by Chris Weitz (*About a Boy*), doesn't bust loose more often, settling for grand instead of groundbreaking.

It helps that Cate Blanchett lets it rip as Ella's evil stepmom. Blanchett is perfectly marvelous, shrewdly blending wicked fun with secret hurt. Nothing steals a scene from Blanchett, except Sandy Powell's costumes and Dante Ferretti's production design, which are all kinds of wonderful. And Branagh's staging of the ball scene, lush enough to rival the one in Vincente Minnelli's *Madame Bovary*, is to die for.

The Cobbler

Adam Sandler

Directed by Tom McCarthy

★

BAD THINGS CAN HAPPEN TO talented people. Take Tom McCarthy, who wrote and directed *The Station Agent*, *The Visitor* and *Win Win*. All gems. His fourth film, *The Cobbler*, is a failure on every level. It's a toxic smear of curdled whimsy about a New York shoe-repair man (a lumbering Adam Sandler), who transforms into his customers when he puts on their shoes. The film is beyond awful and beyond repair.

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BILL WITHERS

[Cont. from 57] ting at his kitchen table reading a political blog on his iPad, as CNN runs quietly on a nearby TV. He watches a lot of television, and he especially loves *Mike & Molly*, *The Big Bang Theory* and the MSNBC prison documentary series *Lockup*. “I really have no idea what he does all day,” says his wife, Marcia. “But he does a lot on his iPad. He always knows exactly what’s going on in the world. Whenever I mention anything, he says, ‘Oh, that’s old news.’”

Marcia, who met Withers in 1976, runs his publishing company from a tiny office on Sunset Boulevard. “We’re a mom-and-pop shop,” he says. “She’s my only overseer. I’m lucky I married a woman with an MBA.” Since Withers was the sole writer of most of his material, he gets half of every dollar his catalog generates – and “Lean on Me” alone has appeared in innumerable TV shows, movies and commercials. Any licensee that wants to use Withers’ master version of one of his songs needs his approval. “If it’s for a scene in a show where somebody is killed or something, we will turn them down,” says Marcia. “We don’t want people to associate, say, ‘Lean on Me’ with violence.” Technically, it’s possible to license a cover of one of his songs without his consent. “But that’s never happened,” he says. “They don’t want to piss me off.”

Bill and Marcia have invested wisely in L.A. real estate. For the past 17 years, they’ve lived in their 5,000-square-foot house, which has three stories and an elevator and is furnished with pricey-looking African art; they bought the home for \$700,000 in 1998, and it’s now worth many times that. It’s crammed with books and mementos from Withers’ career, including a 1974 photo of him with Muhammad Ali. There’s an exercise room on the third floor with several machines, which all look brand-new.

Their children, Todd and Kori, are both in their thirties and live nearby. Bill was an active father after he left the music biz, and he’s very close to them. “We’d have James Brown dance parties in our pajamas,” says Kori, “and take cross-country road trips, blasting Chuck Berry songs the whole time.” Withers also occupied himself with construction projects at his investment properties. (“When I moved to New York for college, he built a wall in the middle of my apartment with a door on it,” says Kori. “He’s always building something.”)

The Withers house also has a recording studio, but Bill has little interest in making new music. “I need a motivator or something to goose me up,” he says. “They need to come out with a Viagra-like pill for folks my age to regenerate that need to show off. But back where I’m from, people sit on their porch all day.”

He’s turned down more offers for comeback tours than he can count. “What else do I need to buy?” he says. “I’m just so fortunate. I’ve got a nice wife, man, who treats me like gold. I don’t deserve her. My wife dotes on me. I’m very pleased with my life how it is. This business came to me in my thirties. I was socialized as a regular guy. I never felt like I owned it or it owned me.”

He hasn’t ruled out a performance at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony in April, though. “There are things that will decide that for me,” he says, mysteriously. Says Marcia, “I know he doesn’t like how older people sound when they sing. I don’t push him. People say that I enable him, but he’s just over it.”

In the meantime, Questlove is determined to get him back to work. “I started my campaign to produce a Bill Withers album back in 2004,” he says. “My first audition was to produce an Al Green album. I figured Bill would see it, love it and agree to record with me. He said, ‘Nope, I’m fine. I don’t want to sing.’ So I made an album with his friend Booker T. Jones, but same thing. Finally I recorded Withers’ ‘I Can’t Write Left Handed’ with John Legend. He still said, ‘Nope.’”

The Legend-Roots album with “Left Handed” won three Grammys, but Withers was unimpressed. “I won’t give up,” says Questlove. “He’s my hero.”

BAGHDAD ON THE BRINK

[Cont. from 53] and terrorism have fused with grievances between local communities. The rise of the militias at the expense of a formal Iraqi state only deeper entrenches the root causes of the conflict. “For a lot of people in Iraq, the militias are heroes,” says Evers. “What we have now is a cycle of sectarian killings – that’s what this conflict has turned into.”

This spring, the Iraqi government is likely to try to retake the city of Mosul, as well as Fallujah and swaths of Anbar Province that ISIS has controlled for more than a year. The U.S. plans to provide training and firepower to back the mission up. “There will be a major counter-offensive on the ground in Iraq,” retired four-star Gen. John Allen, Obama’s envoy to lead the coalition, said recently. “In the weeks ahead, when the Iraqi forces begin the ground campaign to take back Iraq, the coalition will provide major firepower associated with that.”

But many inside the country worry about the human cost of an offensive. “Before the U.S.-led coalition and the Iraqi government undertake any more major firepower efforts, they need to think long and hard about the civilians in those areas,” says Evers. “If things don’t change, it would just be an absolute bloodbath in Mosul.”

SUNNIS IN IRAQ NOW FIND THEMSELVES in an impossible situation, caught between ISIS on one side and the militias on the other. Lina Ismail, the human rights advocate, asks me to meet a family she learned about, on the outskirts of Ghazaliya. We drive around, passing police checkpoints, until we find the place. It’s an old property, from when the area was still semirural, and the walled compound is spacious, with an orchard and a pasture, though the one-story house is shabby and modest. A young girl holding the hand of an even smaller sibling comes out to greet us, silent and dark-eyed, and we follow them down a path under the trees, a sheep trotting ahead of us.

We enter the house through a low, curtained doorway. Umm Zohair, the family matriarch, is seated on a couch in the living room, the black folds of an *abaya* gathered around her. Ismail asks her about her health. “I’ve been sick,” she says quietly. “I need surgery, but we’re a poor family.” Ismail says she might be able to help.

Zohair’s daughter-in-law Umm Abdullah, wearing a full-face veil, explains their story. Her husband, Zohair, the eldest son, had graduated from college but had only been able to find a job as a taxi driver. His younger brother Marwan was a day laborer. Their father, Abbas, tended the livestock. Around a month earlier, a group of armed men in uniforms had come to their

house in the middle of the night and forced their way in. They took away the three men, and the family has heard nothing since. The police at a nearby checkpoint – whom the militia would have had to pass – claimed to know nothing. “Some say they could be in the airport prison, some say in the Interior Ministry, some say in Kadhi-miya,” Umm Zohair interjects tearfully. “We’re dependent on God. We don’t know.”

No one mentions the possibility that they’ve simply been killed. A small child appears in the doorway and is dragged away, shrilly protesting, by his sister. The house seems full of children, in the laps of the women, playing on the carpet, most of them too young to understand anything but the solemnity of these strangers, and the fact that they haven’t seen their fathers and grandfather. “It’s terrible,” says Umm Abdullah. “They’re crying all the time.”

The women search my face for a trace of hope; after all, to them I’m the American, the first they’ve seen since the U.S. soldiers left, a representative of that blind, mighty power that came into the life of every Iraqi, wielding salvation and despair like a deranged god. What is there to say to them about the history that we share, about the tie that will bind us even as I walk away, under the apple branches, to where a little girl still plays by the wheels of our car? Iraq burns; its fate will forever remain on our conscience.

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RS 182 MARCH 13TH, 1975

When Zeppelin Soared

LED ZEPPELIN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THIS MAGAZINE got off to a rocky start. "The latest of the British blues groups so conceived offers little that its twin, the Jeff Beck Group, didn't say as well or better three months ago," John Mendelsohn wrote in his review of the band's 1969 debut LP. "It would seem that, if they're to help fill the void created by the demise of Cream, they will have to find a producer (and editor) and some material worthy of their collective attention."

Mendelsohn wrote an equally scathing review of their second album later that year. Unsurprisingly, the bandmates were a little hesitant when they were first approached about a 1975 cover story. "They had an idea that a cover, given their success, would be better for the magazine than them," Cameron Crowe told *ROLLING STONE* in 2006.

Crowe was just 17 years old in '75, but he'd already been writing RS pieces for more than a year, and he worshipped Led Zeppelin. "I was a fan from Day One," he said. "They were like a darker, less pretty, more subversive Beatles. From the beginning, they were a fan's band."



He hatched a plan to tag along on their 1975 tour until the group relented and agreed to a cover story. "I talked to Jimmy Page on their airplane after a show one night," Crowe said. "He said, 'Joe Walsh said that I should trust you.'" Crowe recalls the guitarist posing for a cover shoot with an armful of black roses: "That was his statement to *ROLLING STONE*. But the magazine chose a live shot in the end." (Above is a photo of Page backstage at an Indianapolis show in '75.)

Mendelsohn, meanwhile, followed his pan of Zeppelin with a long career as a rock writer. He became a regular critic in *ROLLING STONE* – penning an equally scathing review of Neil Young's *Harvest* in 1972 – and he's since written books on everyone from the Kinks to the Pixies. His opinion of Zeppelin hasn't changed, though. "When I discovered YouTube, I was relieved to discover that I felt the exact same way about Zeppelin as I did when I was 21," he said in '06. "I like melody, wit, vocal harmony and expressiveness, all of which are lacking from Led Zeppelin. It's all just showing off."

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